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Dreams and Visions and Personal Ontology

by

Suzanne J. Burgess ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Religious Studies

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 1995

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ABSTRACT

This case study of eight informants' own interpretations of their dreams/visions was undertaken to examine how people in contemporary secularized culture are informed about themselves and the world through reflection on their own dreams and other sleep-related experiences (hypnagogic visions). Eight informants revealed that they engage in elaborate and insightful reflection on their own dreams/visions. They do not take these experiences at face value, but they do rely on them as personal experience. They treat their own dream/vision experience as essentially continuous with all of their life experience and use dream/vision experience to construct and re-construct personal ontologies and lifeworlds.

PREFACE

This thesis concerns the meanings that eight people attributed to their own dreams and some other sleep-related experiences which include hypnagogic visions and out-of-body experiences. This research was undertaken in order to bring a comparative religion focus on the significance which informants would attribute to their dream/vision experience, and on the ontological propositions which they would rely on to interpret these experiences. If one wishes to study the meanings which individuals attribute to their own experiences, then one cannot appropriate those experiences as objects for one's own interpretation. The research data consists in part of transcriptions of informants' recountings of their dreams/visions, and transcriptions of interviews with them in which they described these dreams/visions further in response to my questioning, and in which they discussed their own understandings of these experiences. These dream/vision accounts are not offered as 'once-and-for-all' narrative texts for interpretation, or for evaluation of informants' understanding of them in comparison to how they might be interpreted within any theoretical framework for interpreting imaginative experience. Some comments on dream/vision reports are in order here.

Dream researchers and those who study experiences such as OBEs, rely on the fact that most people try very hard to find the right way to describe these experiences for a listener. It is these reports which have enabled categorical distinction of a number of sleep-related experiences from each other in contemporary sleep/dream research. In addition, the cognitive psychologist Hunt notes that most people take their dream experience seriously enough to struggle for words to impart the experience to someone else. I am aware that as we subjectively attend to different aspects of a dream or some other imaginative experience which we recall, our recountings of that experience may change. The dreams/visions with which this thesis is concerned were chosen by informants because they were experientially significant to them. It is *that* significance with which this thesis is concerned. The dream/vision accounts represent the way informants wanted dreams/visions to be recounted, and as summaries of the experiences we were discussing in interviews. When I made statements or framed questions in ways which did not reflect what an informant wanted to tell me, I was corrected, and therefore I never at any time had the impression that any informant was attempting to tell me something s/he thought I might want to hear. Rather, each person was concerned with what s/he wanted to tell me. After all, informants responded to an ad which asked for volunteers to discuss their own understandings of dreams/visions.

My own process of understanding why these dreams and visions ensued in the significance they did for informants involves an 'interpretive translation' from a dream/vision experience to an informant's conclusions about the experience. In addition, my informants' interpretations of their experiences do become objects for my interpretation in my academic endeavour. As a Religious Studies endeavour, this thesis arrives at conclusions regarding the metaphysical, spiritual and religious themes which I find in my informants' discussions of their dreams/visions. It is my sincere hope that in these two processes, I have not represented any informant in a manner s/he would not assent to. Any errors in my interpretive translation from experience to personal significance, or in my conclusions regarding metaphysical, spiritual or religious themes for comparative religion analysis, are my own.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation for the generosity and trust with which all informants shared their experiences with me. Each person I spoke with entered easily into treating dreams/visions as though they were as real as any other recalled event. An aspect of these interviews that cannot be conveyed in the thesis is how often our discussions resulted in laughter when one or the other of us would momentarily realize the sort of events we were taking so seriously from the 'rationally' evaluative perspective. One of the conclusions of this study is that these people took their dream/vision experience seriously, but not literally and not naively, and I trust that the interviews were as engaging and interesting for informants as they were for me. I also hope that this thesis conveys nothing less than respect for the feelings, values and insights which these eight people shared with me.

I must also thank a number of people without whose advice and support I could not have carried out this research or written the thesis. I owe thanks to Professors Eva Neumeier-Dargyay and Francis Landy for their encouragement and assistance in establishing my Special Master of Arts program in the Religious Studies Department before that Department became part of the Department of Modern Languages & Comparative Studies. I wish to thank my Committee members for their advice and guidance (and for their forbearance in reading several drafts of this thesis!). The Committee members were Professors Earle Waugh and Francis Landy of the Department of Modern Languages and Comparative Studies, Professor David Young of the Department of Anthropology and Dr. Eileen Jackson of the Faculty of Nursing who was External Examiner for this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. The Research Question

In many cultures, sleep-related experiences such as dreams and the spontaneous 'visions' and 'out of body' experiences (OBEs) which occur in the transitional states between waking and sleeping, are viewed as potentially spiritual or religiously significant occurrences. In our culture these experiences are formally viewed as psychological occurrences. The purpose of this study is to examine the personal ontological significance which individuals attribute to their own dreams and other sleep-related experiences in a comparative religion framework. This thesis concerns case study of eight informants' own responses to the dreams, out of body experiences and hypnagogic visions which they selected to relate to me[1].

2. Rationale for the Study

It is well known that people remember and think about some dreams for days or even weeks after experiencing them. Many people remember some of their dreams over a lifetime. A number of sleep research studies indicate that memorable dreams and other sleep-related events are also felt to be significant by those who report them. For example, people report that certain dreams which seem extraordinary compared to their mundane dreams, also seem to be imbued with spiritual significance (Kuiken & Sikora 1991). People who report OBEs, which frequently occur in the hypnagogic state, also report that they are compelled to believe that human consciousness can leave the body (Irwin 1985; Gabbard & Twemlow 1984). Kuiken & Sikora are concerned with phenomenologically establishing the distinguishing characteristics of dreams which enable people to naturally sort them into kinds of dreams. For example, the dreams that most people call nightmares have different characteristics from the kind of dreams which people feel are imbued with spiritual significance. Irwin is concerned with establishing the defining characteristics of OBEs. Gabbard & Twemlow, as psychiatrists, are concerned with distinguishing OBEs from pathological events and states such as dissociative states and schizophrenia for the psychiatric community. These psychological studies do not further explore the spiritual meaning which people might attribute to these experiences, nor do they explore the relation between these experiences and the personal ontologies of those who report them. Although dreams are often explored for personal spiritual meaning in contemporary therapeutic settings, to my knowledge there has been no systematic study of the kind of spiritual significance that people in contemporary secularized culture might independently associate with their own dreams and other sleep-related experience as a result of personal reflection on these experiences.

Doniger & Bulkley point out that human beings have been exploring their dreams for millennia in religious terms and contexts (1993: 69). They claim that religious approaches to dreams in various cultural traditions are "elaborate, insightful reflections on dream experience", and that the 'evolutionary' model of attaining to objective knowledge about dreams in our own secularized culture of the twentieth century is misleading. In its most simplistic form, this model assumes a straight line of progress from the beliefs that dreams were messages from a spiritual realm to our own contemporary view that dreams have scientifically knowable causes which are related to individual psychological makeup. This model is misleading, as Doniger & Bulkley point out, because the secularized 'scientific' view that dreams are publicly knowable objects disregards the fact that people do reflect on their own dream experience, so that what individuals themselves think about their dream experience becomes irrelevant compared to the objectifying, public knowledge of them that the secularized, scientific view seeks. The anthropologist Dentan says that in any ongoing society, at least some individuals or classes within that society take dreams and dream lore seriously, and that attending to dreams is what anthropologists call a 'cultural universal' (Dentan 1987). In contemporary secularized culture the formalized view is that sleep experiences, especially dreams, inform the world and 'experts' about individuals. In this secularized view, dreams/visions are placed in a subjective-objective polarity, where dreams/visions are 'subjective' and therefore are phenomena which can yield an interpretation of the person who experiences them. They are psychologically informing about the individual or about his or her circumstances. This study is concerned with how individuals in such a socio-cultural context are informed about the world and about themselves by their own dreams and sleep-related experiences[2].

The major argument in Doniger & Bulkley's article is that a Religious Studies perspective on understanding the spiritual dimensions of dreams in the secularized culture of the twentieth century West can help us see what distinctive spiritual concerns have been generated by this secularized culture. Doniger & Bulkley, therefore, assume that spiritual concerns will be expressed in dreams. In his book *The Wilderness of Dreams*, Bulkeley uses the concept of root metaphors to interpret expression of religious meaning in dreams (Bulkeley 1994)[3]. He offers the example of a terminally ill woman who dreamed of watching a candle go out on her window sill, and then appear re-lit, on the other side of the window. This simple dream figuratively expresses the continuation of self on the other side of death for the dying woman. Bulkeley's root metaphor approach is aimed at interpreting religious expression in dreaming itself. Other dream researchers, including some more scientifically trained researchers, are also interested in understanding the means by which dream/vision consciousness expresses personal concerns and meaning (cf Hunt 1989 and States 1992). This approach to dream/vision consciousness has valuable application in therapeutic settings. However, this study is based on my interest in exploring the relation between individuals' understanding of their own dreams/visions and their personal ontologies in a contemporary secularized socio-cultural context.

3. Definition of Religion

My expectation at the beginning of this study was that in reporting sleep-related experiences which they considered to be significant, informants might report events such as the appearance of numinous figures, dreams which were imbued with mystical feeling, or perhaps flying dreams. Events of this kind have had religious meaning in past Western religious tradition as well as in non-Western cultural traditions. However, I would not expect members of contemporary secularized culture to reveal the same ontological presuppositions of what dreams/visions are, or the same interpretations of such events, as members of past Western traditions or non-Western traditions reveal in their views of dreams/visions. Therefore I chose to do this study with a comparative religion focus on how my informants would reveal differences or similarities in their understandings of their dreams and visions *vis-a-vis* these other cultural traditions.

For the purposes of this study as an exploratory Religious Studies endeavour, I follow Basso (1987) by defining 'religion' at a first-order level of definition, as the set of ontological propositions which govern the perception and interpretation of reality for a people, or for an individual. Explicitly religious beliefs (and Religion with a capital 'R') are intrinsically related to this set of ontological propositions about reality (Geertz 1979 [1965]). In this study I use the term 'explicitly religious' to mean that an informant indicated that s/he considered a dream/vision to be a religious experience by explicitly saying that it had religious meaning.

Many definitions of 'religion' have been put forth, from Tylor's (1873) minimal but specific definition of religion as 'the belief in spiritual beings', to Geertz's (1965) more elaborate definition of religion as: "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic". The belief in spiritual beings is associated with most religious systems, including the monotheistic Western traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But to impose 'belief in spiritual beings' as a criterion of religiosity on informants' personal interpretations of their own dreams/visions would be to miss much religious meaning that they might express in regards to these experiences. As subjective experiences, dreams and other sleep-related experiences are subject to idiosyncratic expression and wide variation in content. While some members of contemporary secularized culture might take the numinous figures or spiritual beings which often appear in dreams and hypnagogic visions to be actual spiritual beings, other members of this same culture might consider them to be representations of something else, such as a value or a quality or a situation, or perhaps a representation of 'self', in the process of arriving at a personal spiritual/religious interpretation of that dream/vision.

At first glance, Geertz's definition of religion would seem appropriate for this study. My own awareness that the events and imagery of dreams and visions act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations (cf Kuiken & Sikora 1991) was a factor in my interest in exploring the religious themes that might be associated with these moods and motivations for people in secularized culture. However, for Geertz, religion is an established *system* of symbols to be identified as the religion of a group. Because dreams and other sleep-related experiences are subject to idiosyncratic expression and variation in content, and because this study concerns informants' own understandings of that expression and content, it would not be feasible to examine either the dreams/visions or informants' interpretations of them with a view to finding a system of symbols which comprise an identifiable religion for the group of informants. A less specific definition of religion than Tylor's, and a more basic definition than Geertz's definition, is required to explore the religious themes which might be associated with informants' in a secularized socio-cultural context. Geertz's definition of religion is not mutually exclusive with Basso's definition, for Geertz also said: "Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other"; by 'metaphysic' he means the world view of a people, which he calls "the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are" (Geertz 1979 [1965]: 79). So religious symbols, be they objects, acts, events, qualities or relations, are vehicles for conception, and as such are intrinsically related to the set of ontological propositions which govern the perception and interpretation of reality.

4. Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

In this study, I asked volunteer informants to relate one or two dreams or hypnagogic visions which they considered to be extraordinary compared to their mundane dreams and hypnagogic imagery and to discuss how they interpret and understand these experiences for themselves. I also wanted to know why and how informants arrived at these interpretations of their dreams/visions. I assumed that these reasons would involve their presuppositions about dreams and visions and their beliefs about the nature of reality, even if these ontological propositions were implicit rather than explicit in their discussions. Dreams and visions are lived experiences.

We understand any lived experience according to a set of propositions about the nature of reality. Furthermore, dreams and other sleep-related events occur in accordance with these ontological propositions, even if they present images and events that could not be actualized in waking life, and even if we do not easily recognize the recombinations of elements of those ontological propositions that occur in sleep-related experiences when we recall them. I expected that an experience-centred approach to discussion of dreams and visions with informants would shed light on their personal ontologies, which in turn would enable me to understand how informants arrive at their interpretation of these experiences.

I did not rely on established theory for this experience-centred approach; however this approach is allied to the phenomenological school in religious studies because I focus on understanding the connections between dreams/visions and individuals' own interpretations of that experience. Experience-centred approaches are phenomenological; however, phenomenological modes of analysis are not necessarily experience-centred, although a comparative analysis of religious phenomena is characteristic of the phenomenological approach to religion.

The phenomenological school in Religious Studies has always been opposed to both rationalist and purely socio-cultural explanations of religious phenomena. Its earliest expression is in the writing of Schleiermacher in the eighteenth century, who deplored the rationalistic approaches to religion which arose during the Enlightenment. He emphasized that the essence of religion could only be understood on its own terms, that it could not be reduced to anything else, and that it could only be grasped intuitively. Recent adherents to this tradition include Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade as well as the psychologist Carl Jung. They all stress that religious phenomena must be treated and understood as autonomous, *sui generis* phenomena that express an intrinsic aspect of human being in the world. They seek understanding more than the objectifying explanations of rationalist traditions which explain phenomena in terms of other, antecedent phenomena.

The most recent influential proponent of this tradition is Eliade. In his phenomenological approach, religious phenomena must be described and sympathetically understood as *religious* phenomena. Eliade stresses that comparative studies are necessary in order to grasp the universal essence and structure of religious phenomena. For Eliade, all religious phenomena have a symbolic character. In this respect he is in sympathy with thinkers such as Cassirer and Langer on symbolism, for Eliade sees all religious phenomena as necessarily symbolic because they reflect human apprehension of a cosmic structure that is sacred, but which cannot be grasped directly at the level of immediate experience. Eliade said: "What we may call symbolic thought makes it possible for man (sic) to move freely from one level of reality to another" (Eliade 1958: 455, cited in Morris 1987: 179). In their symbolic character, religious phenomena manifest human intuitions of a sacred aspect of reality. As a comparative religionist, Eliade looked for religious archetypes, which he defined as "exemplary models" or "paradigms" for human life in the world (Eliade 1959).

Phenomenological religionists such as Eliade (and Otto in his book *The Idea of the Holy*) speak sensitively and revealingly about the religious experience that underlies religious expression in many cultural contexts. However, they seek complexes of religious symbols and motifs in myths, religious rites and sets of religious beliefs across cultures rather than focussing on the experience of individuals. They would not disagree with Geertz's definition of religion. I do not know what Eliade would think of Basso's definition of religion; however, he defined two existential stances which humanity takes in the world -- one to the sacred and one to the profane (Eliade 1959). He was concerned with the former and not the latter, and therefore he would not focus on the ontology which unites both the sacred and the profane in any people's world view. He has been criticized for devaluing the socio-cultural and ideological aspects of religion by those who are concerned with those aspects; Morris (1987: 181), for example, says that "there is more to ecstatic cults, witchcraft, and rites of initiation (with respect to their sociopolitical functions) than Eliade's mode of phenomenological analysis conveys". And if religious archetypes serve as models for human action in the world they are ideological in practice.

Although Eliade's mode of analysis does convey the religious attitude in human beings, Eliade felt that we in Western secularized culture live in a "desacralized cosmos" and that we have taken up a "completely profane attitude towards the world" (cited in Morris 1979: 179). Eliade's 'profane attitude to the world' can be compared to what I call 'the formalized view' of contemporary secularized culture in Western countries. This view seeks scientific, objectifying knowledge about all phenomena including people, and it seeks to explain phenomena of personal experience in terms of psychological and socio-cultural factors. This view necessarily enters into the personal world views of individual members of secularized culture, regardless of any other influences they may accept (such as membership in traditional Judeo-Christian religious communities). This study is based on my interest in whether or not a 'completely profane attitude' is really characteristic of people in contemporary secularized culture at the level of private, subjective experience which they feel compelled to understand. For this reason it is an experience-centred phenomenological approach to how people understand their own dreams/visions.

Experience-centred methodologies are recent. The participant-observer methodology in anthropology is a recent development of experience-centred approaches in that discipline. It is an attempt to gain deeper insight into life in other cultural traditions by entering into and sharing in the world of other peoples. Young & Goulet (1994) illustrate how members of host cultures often insist that an experience-centred approach on the part of the anthropologist is necessary if s/he wants to understand their accounts of religious experience; they cite Lederman, among others, who was told by Malaysians "that the only way I could know [about the Inner Winds during a shamanic trance] would be to experience it myself" (Lederman 1988: 805, cited in Young & Goulet 1994: 305).

One cannot participate in another person's private dream or vision; however, an experience-centred, descriptive approach in discussions with informants' about these experiences is feasible if one wishes to understand the connections between these experiences and individuals' own interpretations and conclusions about them. I am intellectually indebted to the theoretical underpinnings of Hufford's study of 'The Hag' in Newfoundland, for an experience-centred approach to a sleep-related experience and the folk-belief related to that sleep-related experience. Hufford's methodology is applicable in Religious Studies approaches to religious experience. He claims: "the phenomena involved in numinous experience are in great need of careful description. This procedure does not simply remove expressive culture from the picture; it illuminates and aids in its analysis".

As a folklorist, Hufford bases his experience-centred methodology on his theory that a proportion of all folk belief arises from individuals' accurate observations and adequate reasoning about experience. Therefore, Hufford's phenomenological investigation of hagging is not a content analysis of 'The Hag' folk belief but a description of a kind of experience and how it is related to that folk belief. Hufford carried this investigation through the eastern seaboard of the United States, where the term 'Old Hag' is not used. Being 'hagged' in Newfoundland involves suddenly awakening to experience a supernatural assault by an amorphous but visually and aurally perceived assaulter (the Hag), male or female, while one feels paralysed and unable to escape. The assault may be experienced as murderous or sexual in intent. Descriptions of the same experience were associated with a sense of supernatural assault in the eastern States although there is no Old Hag folklore tradition in that area. Hufford concluded that he had identified and described an experience which 1) is recognizable and distinct from other sleep-related experiences, 2) is found in a variety of cultural settings, 3) has played a significant role in the development of numerous traditions of supernatural assault (for example, the incubus/succubus folklore, 4) that the state in which this experience occurs is best described as sleep paralysis involving susceptibility to a particular kind of hypnagogic hallucination, and 5) that this experience has been the cause of a folk belief rather than being caused by a belief.

Sleep paralysis refers to waking from a period of sleep in which the REM, or dreaming, sleep physiology prevails. In this state there is synaptic inhibition of motor neurons to create inhibition of large limb movements, and hence the subjective sense of paralysis and suffocation. As a hypnagogic state, it predisposes one to imaginative experience as well as to the peculiar physical experience of the state. While Hufford's study suggests that the sleep paralysis phenomenon has played a role in past Western folk beliefs such as the incubus/succubus folklore, this phenomenon is currently being called upon by some investigators to explain the contemporary plethora of 'alien abduction' reports in which individuals allege that extra-terrestrials arrive in the night to examine them medically.

Hufford's study also shed light on the relation between experience of a sleep-related state and folk beliefs regarding supernatural assault in other cultural contexts. Tedlock cites studies that indicate that sleep paralysis experiences play a role in supernatural assault beliefs among the Kagwahiv of Brazil, the Zulu, Fijians, Zunis, Quiches and among the Inuit (Tedlock 1989). For the latter, Tedlock cites investigators who lumped this experience with 'arctic hysteria', but Tedlock points out that from the Inuit point of view, the identification of this experience is better understood as an empirical attitude toward it. I understand her to mean that the Inuit point of view is consonant with individual experience as well as with culturally given categories of meaning for interpretation.

That people rely on their own lived experience, and that individually lived experience enters into expressive culture, are the important lessons to be learned from Hufford's work. These have had application in anthropology as noted above. We can say, then, that there are experiential 'universals' which enter into the beliefs and world views of various cultural traditions, as long as we understand 'universal' to mean subject to individual differences and subject to culturally given categories of meaning.

To recall Hufford's claim that 'numinous' experience is in need of careful description means that his work should have implications for Religious Studies as well. Dreams and other sleep-related events are lived experiences while they are occurring. It is important to understand this lived quality if these experiences ensue in meaning for individuals, including spiritual/religious meaning. Therefore, I attempted to obtain as much of a 'feel' for the experiences which informants related to me as I could, and I asked them to describe sensory, affective and visuo-spatial aspects of these experiences. By means of this information, I attempt some conclusions regarding the characteristics of these experiences which informants felt to be significant compared to their mundane dreams and hypnagogic imagery.

My methodology in this study included willingness to accept accounts of any sleep-related experience which an informant chose to relate to me, rather than asking only for accounts of dreams. I chose this approach for the following reasons.

Other sleep-related experiences such as out of body experiences, which also tend to occur in hypnagogic state, have been categorically defined in Western sleep research, also with implications for cross cultural insight into the experiential origins of ontological and religious belief systems. Dentan (1987) says that the significance of dreams is an anthropological 'universal', although he also warns that we must be careful about cross-cultural comparison regarding dreams of flying, lucid dreams, and experiences such as out-of-body experiences, because the significance and accounting of these experiences in other groups is culturally shaped, and the experiences themselves are shaped in ways which are not easily accessible to ethnographers. We know, for example, that 'flight' out of embodiment in the mundane world is part of a shaman's function, but we could not necessarily expect members of a shamanistic culture to tell us about 'flying dreams' or 'out-of-body' experiences. These are our terms based on our ontological propositions. Yet, in contemporary Western secularized culture, many people have experienced, or are at least anecdotally familiar with, dreams which are imbued with a numinous quality, flying dreams, OBEs, 'visions', and with mystical experiences of oneness with a loving divinity. Once, the mystical communion experiences of people such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross were conceived of as God's gift of his presence to them, and these experiences were sought in contemplation (Underhill 1955). However, the contemporary secularized view seeks a different explanation for these experiences in the makeup or circumstances of the person. These experiences are not formally encouraged and there are no 'culture patterns' for shaping them or their interpretation, or for guiding individuals in terms of finding one kind of sleep-related experience to be more significant than another kind. I felt that to focus only on dreaming would be a research bias in a socio-cultural context wherein there is no *a priori* reason to believe that dreams would be more significant than hypnagogic visions or OBEs, or vice *versa*, to informants themselves.

In summary, this study involved asking informants to relate to me and discuss one or two sleep-related experiences which they considered to be significant, with a view to bringing a comparative religion focus on how these experiences are related to informants' personal ontologies, and whether informants express their understanding of these experiences in terms which may be called spiritual or religious.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

1. Summary of Theoretical Basis for Methodology

My approach to informants' experiences during interviews was based on acknowledging that dreams and visions are lived experiences while they are occurring so that one can recall and attend to them in the same way that one recalls and attends to events of ordinary waking life. While recall of these events cannot be perfect, neither is recall of waking events perfect. Following Hunt, I acknowledge that a dream is first and foremost an immediately experienced subjective state--"a lived story with imagistic properties and powerfully felt meanings" (Hunt 1989: 18). We know this is also true of the sleep paralysis visions which Hufford's informants reported, and I expected that any other sleep-related experience that informants might report would be amenable to questions about its immediately lived qualities. Therefore, in discussions with informants about their dreams/visions, we accorded these dreams/visions the same actuality as events that occur in waking life, so that informants would talk about the events of their dreams/visions and about whatever they thought, felt or saw while these events occurred, as though they were recalling events that occurred in waking life. The full rationale for this methodology is discussed under Theoretical and Methodological Considerations in Chapter One.

2. Procedures

a) Acquisition of Informants

Informants for this study were acquired through an ad for volunteers to participate in a study of how people interpret their own dreams and visions which occur during relaxation or between waking and sleeping, especially those dreams and visions which people consider to be different from their usual dreams and sleep-related experiences (Appendix I). Copies of this ad were placed on posting boards in 9 locations around a university campus, and one copy of the ad was placed on a posting board in a small supermarket off campus. The ad asked for volunteers who would be willing to talk about one or two dreams or 'visions' for one to one and a half hours.

Individuals who responded to this ad were contacted by telephone for screening and to establish an interview time. When a potential informant asked for more information, I explained that I was interested in studying what meanings people attribute to their own dreams or visions, and that I wanted to know what people might have to say if they talked about how one of these experiences influenced their thoughts or moods, or their outlook on life or the world. I emphasized that the only criterion for their choice of experience to talk to me about was that it be one which had been memorable for them. I did not specifically ask any informant, at this time or during the interview, to relate an experience which held spiritual or religious significance for him/er. I asked all informants to bring written accounts of their dreams/visions to the interview, or to be prepared to record them at the beginning of the interview.

Several individuals who appeared to expect that I would explain their experiences to them, were rejected as informants for the study.

b) Interviews

I used unstructured interviews to discuss sleep-related experiences with informants. All interviews were tape-recorded with the written consent of each informant (Appendix II). First I read each informant's written account or listened as s/he recorded it. Most informants initiated our conversations by spontaneously offering information regarding their first responses to the experience. In two or three cases, I initiated the interview by asking the informant to clarify some point in a recounting of a dream/vision, or by asking the informant about the initial effects of the experience if s/he had not offered this information spontaneously. I explained to each person that I wished to gain as much understanding as possible about the lived quality of the experience. I asked about the experiential aspects of the dreams or visions they recounted, such as visuo-spatial, sensory, and affective aspects of the dream or vision. By 'affective aspects' I mean each person's own affective responses to dream or vision elements both during the experience and in his or her recall; but in a number of cases I also asked about the affective quality or 'attitude' of a dream or vision element, for example, a sentient figure or presence in the dream or vision. The specific questions relating to experiential aspects were oriented to the particular dream or vision which each person related to me. At some point in each interview where it seemed appropriate, I asked the informant to talk to me about the significance or meaning s/he attached to a recounted dream or vision, and how that significance might differ from his/er initial responses to the experience.

There were several questions which I asked of each informant: 1) I asked each person how old s/he was at the time of the dream or vision occurred, and how long ago that was relative to the interview. I also asked each person to tell me his/er age, although I reminded each person that s/he was not required to give that information. No informant objected to this question, and each one answered it. 2) I asked all informants to recall to the best of their ability, the time of day or night that their dreams/visions occurred. This information is reported in Chapter Three along with reproductions of each person's dream or vision in order to help contextualize the dream or vision for my reader, but it does not enter into my conclusions in Chapters Four or Five.

All informants also described other sleep-related experiences which they compared to those they had chosen to relate to me for the purposes of the study. I had not intended to ask informants for this information; it was offered spontaneously by each person in the study, and since these were unstructured interviews I wished to let each person tell me anything s/he thought was important. In each case this information provided valuable case study data, and contributed to my conclusions about why the dreams/visions which informants selected for the purposes of my study were more significant for them compared to other sleep-related experiences to which they did not attach significance.

c) Summary of Information and How it is Organized

Although interviews with informants were unstructured, I acquired five categories of information from each person pertaining to the dreams/visions they recounted to me: 1) descriptions of a dream or vision (in some cases two dreams or visions); 2) information about how the informant initially responded to the dream or vision; 3) descriptions of experiential, or lived qualities of the dream or vision; 4) the interpretations of dreams/visions which informants ultimately arrived at in order to understand them; this includes each informant's own reasons for finding his/er dream or vision significant; 5) information about other sleep-related experiences which informants chose to relate to me.

This information enabled me to understand why a dream or vision held significance for an informant, and also enabled me to gain insight into the relation between each person's dream or vision and his or her personal ontology. To present this relation involves an 'interpretive translation' on my part from an experience to its significance for the informant. This process of arriving at why each dream/vision is significant for the informant who reported it is included in Chapter Three along with reproductions of dream/vision accounts and informants' discussions of these dreams/visions. This includes a discussion of whether or not the informant understood his/er experience in explicitly religious terms, and whether or not the dream or vision contained elements of sleep-related experience that have religious significance in other cultural traditions.

In Chapter Four I discuss more thoroughly the relation between the dreams/visions and personal ontologies and the religious themes which I identify in informants experiences and discussions of them. This Chapter incorporates a comparative religion discussion of the religious themes that emerge in this study in the context of differing ontologies. In Chapter Five I offer theoretical conclusions and implications for further research.

3. Description of Informants

Only members of the university community in which my ad for volunteers was posted responded to the ad. There were four men and four women; ages ranged from 22 to 48, with four informants under 30 years of age and four over 30 years. One informant was employed off campus during a break between the third and fourth years of his undergraduate program, and one informant was employed in an academic position. Educational level ranged from the final year of Bachelor programs through Graduate Studies to one informant who had earned a doctorate. The educational areas included Elementary Education, Fine Arts, Psychology, Religious Studies, and Physics. Two informants did not reveal a major area of study. Of the eight informants in this study, five were of European Caucasian ancestry, one was Russian Caucasian, one was of East Indian heritage, born in England, and one was Chinese, born in Hong Kong.

CHAPTER THREE

DREAMS/VISIONS AND DISCUSSIONS WITH INFORMANTS

A. DREAMS

1. The End of the World

The following dreams were tape-recorded for me by an informant I shall call V. V. titled these dreams "Noah's Ark" and "The Bomb Falls". She categorized them as 'end-of-the-world' dreams because in each one a physical catastrosphe occurs that is expected to end the world. The first dream occurred when V. Was ten years old; the second occurred when she was in her early twenties. She was in her mid-thirties at the time of the interview.

"Noah's Ark"

> The dream starts that--not just myself but everyone around me were aware that the world was going to be destroyed by flood again and there is an ark that has been built. There is a prerequisite for getting on the ark, and that is that we come with absolutely nothing, just as we are. I go with my next door neighbour who is also a child--we're both about 10 years old, and her mother. We get to the ark and we see people walking up an invisible plank to the doors of the ark where they go in. And there's all kinds of people going in. So my friend says, "Well perhaps it really is okay if I bring something". She had a favourite toy that she went back to get. And her mother went with her to bring something else. I decided to go on in and wait for them, so I walked up the plank, I could see it at that time; I walked up the plank into the ark and sat down in one of the many chairs that they had near windows, bay windows, so I sat in a bay window and I watched for them to come back. And they did come back and they were both carrying articles that they wanted to bring. They couldn't see the plank to get into the ark. They looked around and I was waving at them and trying to show them, because I could see people still walking up the plank to the doorway, but they couldn't find the plank. And then it began to rain. And it rained so hard and so quickly that we were floating within a few seconds. I was watching out the window but I looked down at my feet and I discovered that the ark was a glass-bottomed boat and I could see bodies floating under the ark, apparently people. It was really horrifying and I know that I wanted to get away from that. So I decided that I would

> go and see the animals. I knew that this ark obviously had to have two of every kind of animal. So I went to what was called the zoo to look at the animals. The animals were all life-sized stuffed toys. They were all toys. The smells were there, the smells of barnyard and hay. And the animals were very realistic-looking, you know, they weren't children's type toys. They were just all very life-sized stuffed animals. I think I stayed down there for just a few moments because I was quite shocked to see that these animals were not real. I went back upstairs, and by that time it had stopped raining and I knew that people were getting off the ark. They were going home. The ark stopped on Mill Creek bridge and let me off. My grandmother lived near there. So I walked to her house. There was no water anymore. When I first got off I think I was about maybe waist deep in water but within a few steps the water was completely gone. And I walked to her house. In the front yard, it was a very small front yard she had, was a tombstone. I don't recall what was written on the tombstone, but I knew that it was her husband's grave - her second husband. She came running out of the house and she was crying; she pulled me into her house and over to the bird cage. I had a bird. At that time she was looking after it. And the bird was lying on the bottom of the cage and it was spluttering, like it had been under the water. And it was coughing and bits of water were coming out of its beak. I picked it up in my hands and it died in my hands. I think I put it back in the cage, I don't recall; but my grandmother and I held hands and ran round to my mother's house, which was where I was living. In the backyard of my mother's house were tombstones of my mother, my sister and my brother. And I realized then that anyone who had not been on the ark would be dead and buried in their own yard with a tombstone erected for them. And that is where I woke up, at that realization. When I woke up I was crying and it was raining outside.

V. recalled that as a child, the immediate impact of this dream was that she wondered if the deaths of her family members in the dream signified that they had done something wrong and were therefore punished by death. She continued for some time to fear that they could be punished in the future. She said, "I got religion in a big way as a child and attempted to convert the family, who wouldn't have anything to do with it". As an older child she debunked this dream because Sunday school classes taught her that God would never send another flood.

I questioned V. regarding the statements in the dream account about the plank for entering the ark, because in her recounting of the dream she states that when she and her friends arrive at the ark they "see people walking up an invisible plank"; later she says: "I could see it at that time" in reference to entering the ark herself. V.explained that within the dream, when she first arrived at the ark, she knew people were walking up an invisible plank, but that when she approached the plank it became visible while she walked up it. When her friends returned with articles they wanted to take with them, she could only see the heads of people walking up the plank as she tried to show her friends where to enter. She understood, just as it began to rain and the ark floated away, that her friends could not see the plank, and were being left behind, because they had disobeyed the injunction to enter the ark with no possessions, while anyone approaching the ark with "absolutely nothing" could see the plank as the means for entering the ark. Her final realization in the dream that anyone who had not been on the ark would be dead and buried in their own yard with a tombstone erected for them was accompanied by the realization that the tombstones were erected not simply to mark their graves, but as indicators that these people had failed to save themselves in the implacable imperative to enter the ark for salvation.

The second memorable dream which also involved V.'s 'end of the world' theme is the one she called "The Bomb Falls". V. was inclined to speak of "Noah's Ark" and "The Bomb Falls" together. In order to preserve the integrity of her own feeling regarding these two dreams, the following account of "The Bomb Falls" is offered before going on to discuss V.'s understanding of these dreams.

"The Bomb Falls"

I was living in England at the time. I was with a man, Michael, and in the dream the government had announced on television that the world was going to end, the bomb

> was going to be dropped and we would all die so we wouldn't have to worry about anything, in just one second we would be gone. So we all went outside holding hands and we watched the plane fly overhead and drop the bomb. We were waiting for it to come down, we watched it descend and Michael and I decided that we would go out kissing, we would die in each other's arms sort of thing. So my eyes were closed. I could feel the heat at the back of my head and the strongest wind, it just about knocked us over; the heat was incredibly intense--the hair burned off at the back. And then we were still there, and there were people walking around shouting and screaming and shaking their fists in anger at the government and whoever because they lied to us. We were going to live, and we were then going to have to survive this and fight for food and this whole realization came, and I thought "I've got to get away" and I found a cellar and began to hoard anything I could find but other people came in and then were trying to kill me because I had hoarded things they didn't have, and it went along those lines, people attacking each other for whatever they could get in order to survive.

For V., "The Bomb Falls" ensued in disturbing feelings of "being cheated", both within the dream and in its immediate impact, because in this dream the government had lied when it said that everyone would die in the nuclear disaster. She described the manner in which people became enemies to fight over food and scarce commodities instead of joining together to help each other, as a "remainder" of life as it had been before the bomb fell. V. stated that this strife created an over-whelming feeling of difficulty about going on with life which emerged at the end of this dream. However, V. added that both "Noah's Ark" and "The Bomb Falls" involved feelings of being cheated, because, "there were leftovers from the life before, and that was an uncomfortable part of the dreams". There was "something cruel" for her about the tombstones left as reminders of the people who had not entered the ark, and also about the manner in which people had to continue living after the bomb fell in the second dream.

Both of these dreams were vividly experienced. Describing the grief that she experienced in Noah's Ark, V. said: "It hit me the most when I was holding the bird and it died, that was the saddest thing for me. The moment of seeing the tombstones of my family was also a sad thing, a disturbing thing, but not the same kind of powerful grief I had when the bird died in my hands". There were tactile sensations of holding the bird in her hands, for she recalls feeling the warmth of the bird's body as it spluttered water, and feeling life go out of it when it died. When she and her grandmother arrived at her mother's house and saw the tombstones, her realization of the full meaning of the tombstones was an emotionally disturbing experience, which ensued in her waking up crying.

Strong sensory and affective experience were also part of "The Bomb Falls". V. said that she experienced in a tactile way the heat, the singeing of the hair at the back of her neck, and the force of the wind created by the exploding bomb during the dream,. She was aware of intensified light along with the sensation of heat and force of the wind, while she and her boyfriend embraced and her eyes were closed. She described this as similar to distinguishing different intensities of light through closed eyelids when one is awake, such as turning toward the sun with one's eyes closed. Her realization of how people would have to live after the bomb failed to completely destroy the world was also intensely felt. Although V. categorized these dreams as 'end of the world' dreams, she agreed that in these dreams the world did not actually come to an end, but the catastrophic event permanently altered the conditions under which life and the world were to continue. It was therefore the world as she knew it before the catastrophes, which came to an end. The altered conditions of life after this event were more disturbing than the event itself in both dreams.

Both of these dreams continue to have meaningful implications for V. her in terms of her sense of life after death. She said: "I feel very sure that there is life after death, simply because in the dreams there are survivors, the people go on...I've often wondered if that was a saved-unsaved message, a kind of heaven and hell message - I thought of it in those terms as a child".

As an adult, V. does not take the dreams, nor the notions of heaven and hell, literally. Because she experienced being a survivor of a catastrophe which was meant to end the world, V. interprets this survival as *figurative* indication of life after death. The condition of being a survivor in these dreams was not a happy one, for within both dreams, V. experienced separation and grief, and the sense that something cruel had happened. There were disturbing 'leftovers' and 'reminders' of life as it had been before the catastrophe including tombstones to remind the living of the dead. V."s ultimate conclusions about these dreams integrated the experience of altered conditions of life within her dreams with her sense that they carried a 'life after death' message. She says: "I see them as gifts, I see them as things told to me to reassure me, actually that there is life beyond here. And I think they also show me that I do have a responsibility to help other people become more spiritual, to help other people see that there is a heaven and hell. But I have that responsibility and I have to work". V. described her conception of being spiritual to mean not just commitment to God (in her case a Christian concept), but also to mean a loving and caring attitude in her relations with friends, family, and all others.

In summary, V. interpreted these two dreams in explicitly religious terms. She expressed the belief that these dreams were 'gifts' from God to reassure her that there is spiritual life after death, and to inform her of her own spiritual responsibility in helping to avoid ways of living that are spiritually damaging to human beings. She also expressed her conception of spirituality as love and caring for others. By interpreting her experience of the separation and loss that was associated with the altered conditions of life to be a figurative representation of 'hell', she also revealed that in her personal religious ontology, destruction of the continuum in human relations is equivalent to 'hell'. This would imply that in her religious ontology, transcendence of separation and distinctions among people is, figuratively, 'heaven'.

V. also told me about another dream in her end-of-the-world typology, in which her family pulled the living room sofa up to watch the ending of the world through their living room window, "just like watching a movie through the rectangular window". The family felt excitement and curiosity but no fear. She saw the sky roll back like the "lid on a tin of sardines until it blew away in the wind, and the mechanical workings of the universe were revealed behind it in a bright light". V. also related a sleep paralysis experience in which she thought that three or four kittens, which she heard but did not see padding across the room, leapt up on her bed and began all together to gently try to nudge her off her bed. These were interesting and memorable experiences for V., but she did not attribute any religious significance to them as she did to "Noah's Ark" and "The Bomb Falls".

2. Time Travelling

The following two dreams are reproduced from the written accounts given to me by an informant I shall call F. F. is of East Indian descent, born in England. F. was raised as a Roman Catholic, and considers herself to be very "westernized". However, as a child she was taught to pray in Hindi by her grandmother, and Hindu religious elements often enter her dreaming. F. does not title her own dreams, so I shall refer to these dreams as Time Travelling for ease of reference to them later. These dreams occurred a few weeks apart, approximately four to six months before the time of the interview. F. was 22 years old at the time of their occurrence.

"Time Travelling" - First Dream

> I am 22 years old [in the dream] and I travel back to England to my childhood and visit my family and myself [as a child]. The dream starts out that I am visiting my aunt's house which was one block away from my home. I meet a family member and tell them who I am. Then I meet my mom who looks younger in the dream than she presently is. I ask her questions and tell her who I am. I ask her where I [myself as a child] am. She tells me that I am in one of the back rooms. She describes how I am dressed and what I am doing. There seems to be urgency for time. I tell her that I want to speak to myself, but that I don't have time. But I tell my mom to let her [myself as a child] know that no matter what happens in life, to have faith that she'll make it through all her crises and not to worry, everything will be okay and when she grows up she'll be happy.

F. stated that upon awakening from this dream, she had very positive feelings. For several days after it occurred, she felt a sense of resolution and closure about both her childhood and a period of turmoil that followed in her teen years. She believes that she has survived the period of turmoil well, and the manner in which she made a trip to her own past in her dream to reassure herself as a child that all would be well for her in the future, along with its positive and resolving effects, made this an extraordinary and memorable dream for her. She also said that the dream continues to have a "message" quality for her in the present, because it confirms for her now that she can survive all crises if she has faith. F. summed up her own interpretation of this dream as follows: "I was telling myself something now, too, not just myself as a child".

The communications between herself and her mother in this dream were not verbally specific in her awake recall of the dream. Although she dreamed that her mother told her what she was wearing, that she was singing a song which she "remembered" within the dream as one she enjoyed singing as a child, and that she was playing in a particular room in the house, she could not recall upon awakening exactly what her mother said she was wearing or doing as she played; nor could she remember the song. She did recall that she had been dreaming of an actual house and neighbourhood in which she lived as a child in England. During the dream, then, she recognized all that her mother told her about herself, but upon awakening she was left with an ineffable sense of familiarity, which she described as similar to *deja vu*. In response to questioning about her statement "There seemed to be an urgency for time", F. explained that within the dream she was aware that she had travelled back in time, and that she could stay only briefly because she had to get back to this time. She could only leave a message for herself with her mother because she felt that at any moment she would return to this time, although she did not have a sense within the dream of anything specific forcing her to return.

The second dream F. chose to relate is in some respects similar to the first. It repeats the theme of travelling back in time, in this case to a past historical period rather than to a personal past; and in this dream a well as the first, much of the communication which occurred in the dream became ineffable in her awake recall.

"Time Travelling" - Second Dream

> I go back in time and meet King Ramses and he tells me various things. The dream starts where I'm walking up these stone steps. I go behind a red curtain and I'm amazed that I see an Egyptian city. Ramses is sitting with his children around a pool of water. The statues I see fit in with the Egyptian environment, except for one, a large figure of Lord Shiva. It's the most beautiful statue I've ever seen. It makes me feel happy and at peace with myself. I sit down and talk to Ramses; he shows me his city that he is building. The beautiful enamel falcon that when you stand next to it is like standing beside a large skyscraper is there. Everything is colorful and vibrant. He tells me that he fears that all that he builds will be forgotten by humanity. I tell him that to this day people from all over the world come and marvel at his works. He also fears that his children will forget his achievements; once again I reassure him. He tells me of this great fountain that he built and it must be turned on. We discuss religion and how human beings must know where they come from, and that the past is so much a part of the future. I get this feeling of happiness and almost enlightenment. Ramses tells me to go turn on the water fountain. I leave Ramses and go through the red curtain and find myself by an old fountain. The valve to turn it on is in the basement of some building. Trying to find the valve I get the feeling that someone does not want me to turn it on. When I find the valve there are a lot of little spiders around it. I turn on the valve and rush out to see it turn on. The water comes rushing out and I feel it falling on my head and rushing by my feet. It's cool and clear, and there is a great sense of happiness. Then I have an overwhelming fear that I've lost my wallet and my money, but I find them intact, and then I wake up.

When she awoke from this dream, F. felt "good, happy, and that everything was harmonious". She also felt that some important wisdom had actually been communicated to her through this dream of travelling back in time to visit Ramses, especially in the moment of 'happiness and almost enlightenment'. This moment of happiness and enlightenment became ineffable in that she could not put into words, upon awakening, exactly what she understood during this moment in the dream, except that it was about the "wisdom of the past" which human beings must know because it is necessary for "human spiritual evolution". The moment of 'happiness and almost enlightenment' contributed most to the sense of spiritual significance of this dream.

F.'s statement about "The beautiful enamel falcon..." seemed to imply a recognition of something familiar, possibly something seen on a trip to Egypt, or in a book on Egyptian art. However, F. said that the feelings of recognition and familiarity with this falcon were part of the dream, and that she could not recall that she had ever actually seen anything like it in her life. She described it as majestically and perfectly beautiful, and she could still recall the vividness of its blue.

I asked F. to elaborate on the beginning of the dream, where she walked up a set of stone steps toward the red curtain. She said that the beginning of the dream had a feeling of a "trekking holiday" about it, a feeling of exploring buildings while on vacation. When she parted the curtain, it was as though she entered another time and place.

When she had to pass back through the curtain to turn on the fountain, the surroundings were no longer "Egyptian". The fountain seemed to be "old European". She had to go underneath the fountain to turn it on, and here she seemed to be in a place which was like the basement of a building, but she understood that it was under the fountain. She had the sense of being watched as she searched for the valve to turn on the fountain, and that whoever was watching did not want her to turn it on. She recalled that she found the valve not only covered with spiders, but in a condition of rust and decay. After turning the fountain on and finding herself above ground again, she was barefoot, and she looked down to see the water flowing at her feet. She described the sensation of water flowing over her feet as very real, tactile, and she said, "it felt really good and refreshing". She felt happy in this moment that the fountain had been turned on in spite of the disapproval she sensed.

In her subsequent reflections on this dream, F. concluded that in the ineffable moment of 'happiness and almost enlightenment', it was communicated to her that human beings evolve to higher spirituality together. She also felt that turning on the fountain was symbolic of releasing the 'wisdom of the past' as a source of spiritual nurturance for everyone. The appearance of the statue of Shiva in the dream did not seem incongruous to her within the dream, and she ultimately concluded that it meant confirmation that all religions have truth. In this context F. stated that she sees the human race as one community, and that is why she feels no conflict between her westernization and her interest in Hinduism, nor any real discrepancy in the appearance of a statue of Shiva in a dream of ancient Egypt.

F. viewed both of her dreams as 'gifts' from a spiritual source of wisdom within people. She interpreted the second dream to convey that this spiritual source of wisdom is "not true", and "not complete", if one does not acknowledge that it is "connected to the wisdom of all religions". She also spoke of the value of preserving heritage, and of her belief that her grandmother, as a representative of an older tradition was a positive influence in her life. F. stated that during her childhood her grandmother frequently told her that her dreams are always "telling her something".

F. did not discuss any specific historical knowledge about Ramses that she may possess; she may or may not be aware that one of the pharaohs who went by the name of Ramses was a warrior pharaoh who was very concerned about his posterity. But given F.'s strong values regarding relations between younger and older members of an extended family, I think it is not coincidental that Ramses appeared to her in this dream with the same informal familiarity and concern for teaching her with which her own grandmother may have sat and talked with F. In this dream she experienced both a teaching from Ramses, and a participation with him in a task to further spiritual nurturance for human beings. The appearance of Ramses in this dream is comparable to the appearance of ancestral figures who appear in the dreams and visions of people in traditional cultures to impart spiritual wisdom, for in F.'s dream, Ramses is imbued with this sort of quality for F.

Like V., F. spoke of the dreams she chose to discuss with me in explicitly religious terms, and like V., she considered these dreams to be 'gifts' from a spiritual dimension which she believes to be a source of wisdom in human beings. She also expressed religious values in her conception of humanity as one community, and her notion that humanity evolves spiritually in community.

F. informed me that she has some dreams which, although they contain religious imagery such as the presence of a Hindu deity, are dark, confusing and frightening. She considers these dreams to be nightmares, and believes that they are more a result of fatigue or temporary emotional tension in her life, than reflections of the spiritual souce of wisdom which she believes to be the source of the dreams she related to me for the purposes of my study.

3. The Atonement

The following dream account is reproduced from the written account brought to the interview by an informant I shall call D. "The Atonement". D. recalled that this dream occurred approximately three months before the interview, when he was 22 years old. I shall call this experience

"The Atonement"

> ...I am on the outskirts of a village where it begins to meet a forest. There is chaos around me; rioting, looting, fires burning in houses and buildings. To my left there are buildings made of some kind of clay or mud, no taller than three or four stories. The population is black, and very poor. The clothes they are wearing are mostly white, dirty, and tattered. It is like a small war zone, only on a local scale. In front of me is a house elevated off the ground and on fire. Occasional gunfire rings out, but for some reason I know there are not too many guns out there. I am in army uniform with helmet and my rifle is beside me. I am feeling as though I live in this country, but not in this area. In fact, I know this is the poor area and I live in a "white" area which is more well to do. I come across a dead child, and find myself with a little black child, about 6 years old, in my arms. He has been killed somehow. Before seeing this, there were no feelings of fear or excitement, only a numb calm, like I am in the eye of a tornado. Now, seeing this boy, there is incredible grief. I am on my knees, holding him, and there is blood all over him. I was friends with this boy, and gave him candy on occasions. I am crying; the grief and sadness are incredible...Then it is sunny outside and I am walking across a park, toward a building on the corner of a street. The building is some kind of business, like a restaurant. The roads are clear and the park is across the street from the building I'm walking towards. Several others, men, are with me, walking towards the same building. We are police officers and we are going to bust up some kind of illegal operation. One police officer crosses the street about forty feet from the corner. Then another officer, and another, until we are all at the front door of this building. When we were about to cross the street, one of the officers sees that I am anxious and tells me to put my mitts down -- because my hands are reaching for my gun. We get to the door and we all rush in. We surprise some men on the other side of the door and they get up from the table and they, along with some bodyguards, start shooting at us. We rush in with our guns blazing and I feel myself take a bullet to the head. I fall backwards and see the other officers rush past me. A few seconds later an officer checks me out and tells me to hand on, that I'll be okay, but I know that I'm dying, and I think of my pregnant wife (I'm not really married). Then everything goes black, then I flash back to when I was holding the small, black child. He is in front of me, his eyes are wide open, and huge and white. He is smiling, and then he waves at me says "bye bye". Everything is

> peaceful and I see his spirit leave his body. Then I flash back to where I am shot and lying on the ground. In both cases the surroundings don't exist. Again the little black child is with me, but this time my eyes are huge and all I see is light. I am smiling this time and wave to the child (as if we had reversed somehow) and now I say "bye bye"; then I feel my own spirit leave my body and go up a ways until I am lying in total darkness, alone. All I am aware of is a feeling of joy and relief. I am crying in joy and relief, thanking God while I am lying there. To see the boy again and come to terms with the grief that I harboured, brought about incredible emotions. Then I woke up.

One of the immediate impacts of this experience for D. was a receptivity to the idea of reincarnation, because in both segments of this dream he vividly experienced being someone else whom he has never been. However, D. accepts the idea of reincarnation as only a possibility and is not entirely committed to belief in it.

I asked D. if he felt guilt during the dream regarding the child's death in the conflict of 'haves' and 'have nots'. He replied that during the dream he knew that it was "just the situation that had done that [caused the child's death], and there was terrible regret for what had been happening in that situation there. And I knew it was outside my power and not my fault".

The first sentence of D.'s written account of this dream experience began with a set of ellipses. I asked the reason for this, since I wondered if the ellipses indicated some vaguely recalled parts of dreaming prior to where this dream began. D. explained that he had a history of this kind of dream, because he has dreamed a number of times in the past of being in the poorer quarters of some country where there is conflict between the "haves" and "have-nots", where he appears as both familiar friend to the poorer inhabitants as well as in some peace-keeping or observing capacity. He said that sometimes this kind of dream seems to involve a Caribbean or

African country, and that sometimes there seems to be a "creole" feeling to the poorer quarters. During these dreams he recognizes the community of poorer inhabitants as part of a larger community where he lives. Therefore the ellipses indicate his own subjective sense of continuity among these kinds of dreams.

My next question concerned his statement in the dream account that "the surroundings don't exist". He explained that "at that point in the dream I was out of time and space", and he further explained that this experience of being out of time and space had first occurred for him in the transitional state between waking and sleeping. This 'out of time and space' condition had begun to enter his dreams, and the dream accounted here was the first dream in which this condition entered as significant to the dream's theme. He described the 'out of time and space' experience as a feeling of removal from ordinary reality, where he can see and hear in an abstract sort of way, but not with eyes or ears because there is no sensory impression of surroundings, whether "surroundings" refer to his room if the experience occurs in the hypnagogic state, or to a dream location if it occurs in a dream.

D. described the shift between what seems to be two separate dreams as "almost as if you're watching TV and your reception goes off and then on again", and it was also a bit like a "scene shift in a movie" with the same awareness of continuity that one has in following the scene shifts in movies.

Like V., D. experienced strong tactile sensations in this dream which were consistent with dream events. About the death of the child, he said: "I'm holding him and my hands are dark with blood. I'm holding him and my hands are shaking, and

I'm feeling tight around here (pointing to his chest). There's a body feeling to that scene". About being shot, he said: "I felt the hit...it felt almost like someone were to flick you with their fingers on the head. And I felt heavy--I felt the hit, and then my head felt very heavy, and I fell back". His statement in the dream account "Then everything goes black" describes not only his experience of dying in this dream, but also his entry into the condition he calls out of time and space during the dream. In this condition he encountered the child again, and a strange sort of reversal occurred, which was difficult for D. to describe. When everything had become black, he explained, suddenly the child was there. D. described his thoughts during the out of time and space condition in this dream as a "knowing that nothing else mattered, nothing else existed, there was just something that had to be done there. Something like unfinished business". D. understood his own being there in this out of time and space place, as being there for the child. "I'm there because of him", he says, and "it's his time". As he and the child were looking at each other, the child's eyes were very huge, and D. experienced a mental flashback to the war zone where the child had died; he knew within the dream that he was not really there in the riot zone, but only remembering that situation. The child smiled and said "byebye", and D. was aware of the child's spirit leaving his body. But then a reversal occurred in which D. "mentally flashed back" to his own being shot in the second dream situation, and now the child was there for D. D. said "it's my time now"; he felt that now his own eyes were huge, and he smiled and said "bye bye" to the child. Then he felt his own spirit leave his body and he ascended upwards to a place where he was alone in 'out of time and space'. Here he experienced "laying down somewhere, crying. There was an incredible amount of release--a huge burden was taken off me. The grief I carried because of that little boy, it was all of a sudden released". It was for this opportunity to come to terms with the child's death that he was thanking God in the dream.

The experience of coming to terms with the child's death comprises the significance of this dream for D., and accords with his own sense of the purpose of some dreams in general. He said: "I've had some dreams that feel really deep for me, really spiritual or religious. I think it's a built-in device to help us in our spiritual growth--when I'm ready to be told something, I have a certain dream that helps me in my understanding". D. felt that the dream he recounted for me was one of this type which aids in spiritual growth and understanding, which conveyed to him that "there is a coming to terms in this life with what we build for ourselves, and release from the pain that we build in this life". Therefore, in D.'s view a spiritual lesson occurred in his complex dreaming experience.

D. spoke of this dream experience in explicitly religious terms because the dream felt religious for him; he considered it to be a gift of understanding about the spiritual aspect of his life as a human being. Specifically, he believes there is a god and a spiritual reality which is the source of some dreams, and which provides the means for "coming to terms in this life" with the pain that accumulates in human life.

The 'out of time and space' experience which D. discussed in the interview first occurred in the hypnagogic state, and began similarly to an out of body experience. D. felt himself become diffuse and begin to move toward a larger, sentient being which invited, but did not coerce, his union with itself. He described the larger entity as being composed of other smaller conscious entitites like himself, but also "something more". During the experience he believed the larger entity to be God. When he suddenly remembered that his body was back on his bed, he became concerned that something would happen to it so he began to move back until he felt himself lying on his bed, and became fully awake. D. also informed me that he has had flying dreams since early childhood. He stated that as far back as he could recall, he seemed to just know in his flying dreams that he could fly. He also tends to incorporate elements of the fantasy board game 'Dungeons and Dragons' into his dreams, and finds himself casting spells on other dream characters in these dreams. However, D. is aware that these dreams are carryovers from his waking life, and does not attribute any special significance to them.

4. The Old Castle Dream

The following is a transcription of a tape recorded dream account by an informant I shall call A. A. is Russian, and a physicist. The transcript, and some direct quotations from the interview, reflect the fact that English is not A.'s first language. A. told me that the following dream occurred about eight years prior to the interview, when he was in his early thirties. A. referred to this dream several times as "the old castle dream" so I have retained this phrase as a title for it.

"The Old Castle Dream"

I dreamt that I am in old castle, ruins without windows and without doors and without roof. The grass and trees grow on the grounds in the castle; it was sunny because I saw blue sky; it looked like a Catholic castle. I saw only walls, rather high, Catholic architectural ruins. I wasn't alone. Two of my friends were with me. And something strange was there, because I felt as if I am going to fly. It was a very very strong feeling inside my breast, somewhere in the centre of my breast, I had the feeling that if I inhale air, I become light and can fly in any direction, in a very smooth line. But my friends helped me in this. I was irritated about this, because I was proud that I could fly without them, but I knew that they helped me in some way; they initiated me. They got me this gift I took it as I was proud I could fly without them. I felt that this was my gift. My friends were believers, and I was not. They were Orthodox believers. They were my close friends before they became believers and they remain my close friends. But I thought, and I still find, that I am not a believer. So I was a little irritated by this discrepancy--I felt in the dream that because they were believers, they gave me the gift, and I took this gift. And I felt in my skin, and I felt air inside me, and I felt this flying. And I began to fly. Through the open roof over the walls. I escaped from this castle. And I woke with a mixture of feelings, of absolute freedom, and as I was escaping over the walls of the castle, I felt this feeling inside that even if I were awake I could repeat the flying. I knew I was dreaming, but I felt I could repeat the flying without dreaming. And then I woke up.

A. reported that upon awakening from this dream he felt in a "joyful" mood. He was on a camping trip in the Caucasus Mountains with friends (not the friends of the dream situation) when the dream occurred, and he told them jokingly: "Today I have charisma". For A. this was an especially memorable dream because, he said, "I wanted only to fly. This was most important for me in this dream". He said that to this day he can bring back the internal sensations he describes in the dream account to vivid recall in spite of the fact that the dream occurred eight years prior to the his relating it to me.

Compared to most of his flying dreams, this one was different and special for A. not only because there was great joy during and after the dream, but also because it was especially vivid, because it was rather brief, seeming to last "only two or three minutes", and because just before he awoke, he became lucid and felt convinced that now he could fly even if he were not dreaming. He said:

> It was a physical feeling. I felt everything, I felt winged, I felt circulation of the air inside me, I saw the moving of clouds in the sky. I saw trees and grass--below me and around me. I smelt eucalyptus just before I flew. My friends were behind me...I was doing my own thing, and at the same time we were connected to each other.

We established that to be aware that one is dreaming while one is dreaming is called 'lucid dreaming'. A. informed me that he frequently dreams of flying, and that he is usually lucid in his flying dreams. The above dream was unusual compared to his other flying dreams because he did not become lucid until just before he awoke.

I asked A. about his statement that he was "irritated" about being 'initiated' by his friends during the dream. He explained that he was irritated only "for a second or two" during the dream, because he knew that he was flying "due to them, and at the same time I wanted to feel I have this gift without them". Since A. had frequently flown in dreams before, he did have the gift of flying before it was bestowed by his friends; therefore this feeling of discrepancy in the dream is understandable in the context of his tacit knowledge within the dream that he alredy knew how to fly.

I commented that if he felt winged in the dream, and felt air currents and the whole physical experience of flying, then it was almost like experiencing another form of existence. He concurred that it is another existence to fly in dreams, but that he does not feel this experience contradicts his education or other aspects of his life. He referred to dreams as "really another life" and as "different spaces". A. described how he sometimes uses different dream spaces. He can escape from one dream to another, without awakening, by opening a door to a corridor or stairwell by means of which he makes a transition to another dream 'space'. He is lucid at the time of making this decision. He claimed that during some nights he "can have a few spaces of dreams" in which he remembers previous dreams which he decided to leave, and makes a decision to return to them in order to check out how the situation has changed in his absence. In these cases, he returns to the previous dreams which he recalls via a stairwell or corridor, just as he left them. He recalled that once he returned to check former dreams four or five times in the same night.

According to A.'s description of dream 'spaces', then, he means different dream situations; when he changes dreams, he enters a new location, entirely different in appearance from the one he left, where a different situation prevails. He described this as "just like going from inside a room out to the street, but not to the same street as is usually outside one's room". A new dream experience begins here. Because he is frequently lucid in his dreams, he may recall a previous dream 'space' and 're-enter' it. For A. the phrase 'dream spaces' is appropriate to describe his experience of multiple lucid dreams as they sometimes occur over the same night's sleep. He considers the dream he recorded for me to be special because it did not involve this kind of series of dreams as most of his lucid, flying dreams do. Instead, he said, "[this one] was complete in itself, and very joyful, where the only important thing was to fly".

A. also talked about how he uses the ability to fly in dreams and the ability to 'change dreams' because frequently someone or something is chasing him in the dream. He uses these dream abilities when he wants to escape danger himself or help someone else to escape danger. He described the chaser as "a presence of something, usually behind me, not in front. A person with consciousness, cleverness. Sometimes a sort of spirit, or invisible supernatural thing". He never sees the person or entity who chases him in these dreams. He said that it was typical for him to dream that while he is in a room with another person, a knock on the door signals danger, and he must take the person in his arms and fly out of the window. In these dreams others are not aware of the danger; he pushes or carries them to a safe location and then may leave the dream to escape danger himself. He stated that he has freqently been chased in flying dreams since he began to have them in his childhood. He also informed me that in some flying dreams he enters the eye of a tornado because he likes the feeling of entering the tornado, but he has never recalled what happened next in one of these dreams.

I asked A. if he felt there was any meaning in the particular dream he chose to relate to me. His reply is interesting and worth quoting in full:

> I don't know. I think life has no aim, no purpose, no underlying aim or purpose. We describe it in terms of aims and purposes, and we describe dreams the same way. I deal with reality in dreams, I deal with reality when I am awake. They are different places, different reality, and still the same reality, there is no difference between dreams and reality.

However, A. wanted to add that in terms of interpretation of this dream, he feels there is significance in the fact that the friends who initiated him were from the same profession and Institute as he, and that they had converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. He attended church with them a few times but did not become a Christian. He added "They remain my friends up to now, but spiritually we differed".

We recall here that A. had the feeling of being in Catholic ruins at the beginning of his dream, along with a feeling of discrepancy that his Orthodox friends were initiating him into flying and that they were doing so in the spirit of bestowing a 'gift' on him. The discrepancy felt in this dream can be understood to arise not only from his own awareness that he already knew how to fly, but from the fact that Christian friends who "spiritually differed" from him were bestowing the gift of flying on him. A. could not further articulate his feeling of significance in the fact that these friends were the ones to initiate him in this dream.

However, A. added that in his earlier flying dreams, he flew "smoothly, sliding over a smooth layer of air, downwards", and it was difficult to control his flying, but that flying always works for him after so much practice, and is easier since the old castle dream. It had not occurred to me until this reference to practice that there could be a technique of flying in dreams, but A. confirmed that there is a particular technique which he practiced from early on in his flying dreams, and which he must use to fly successfully in his dreams. He described this technique as follows:

> I need to inhale air and keep my breath and something in this place (pointing to the solar plexus area) inside me - it becomes light and keeps me up flying, but I can breathe at thesame time. I should keep a particular volume inside here. This volume is located not just in a point, at the solar plexus, it has breadth and depth, all the way through to my back. There's a feeling one has in the morning just as one awakens, a pleasant feeling, which one makes go away when one stretches--this feeling, before you stretch, accompanies the feeling of air inside me; it must be there for me to know I can fly. It's a pre-condition. This air inside feels soft but firm--hard to describe. There is also a sensation of freefall without really falling. I keep my balance by keeping my rate of breathing regular and then I go up; if I lose control of my rate of breathing, I go down slowly. If I maintain all these sensations together, I can succeed. I don't feel my feet working, and I can fly in an upright standing position.

A. Said that although he practiced this technique in his flying dreams as early as his teen years, "after the old castle dream, it is easier to maintain all the necessary sensations, and I paid less attention in dreams to having to succeed at the technique". A.'s background of flying dreams is very important to understand the specialness of "The Old Castle Dream", not only because it was different from other flying dreams as he described these differences, but because it was a breakthrough dream after which he flew more easily and with less attention to his technique for flying than before.

Unlike the first three informants who reported dreams, A. did not discuss his experience in religious terms. His use of the world 'spiritual' referred to his inner, personal life, including his dream life, and his outlook on life in general. When he said that he and his friends spiritually differed, he meant that they differed in this way. However, there is a relationship between his dreaming experiences and his personal ontology, for he says that he thinks life has "no underlying aim or purpose" although "we describe it in terms of aim or purpose", and that "we describe dreams the same way". His flying dreams are "another existence" in "different spaces", but this is because existence is experienced and lived according to how we describe it. In A.'s view, dreaming and waking life constitute different realities which are yet the same reality.

Although A. did not attribute religious meaning to his dreams, he reported elements of sleep-related experience that have religious significance in other cultures, especially traditional shamanistic cultures. These are flying, dream lucidity, dream control, and the use of flying to help others. Furthermore, he reported that when he uses flying to help others escape danger in his flying dreams, only he is aware of the danger and those he must rescue are not. He also reported practicing flying in dreams, although he is not culturally encouraged to cultivate this capacity. Finally, there is another parallel in A.'s dreaming with experience in some traditional cultures: I suggest that in the dream which A. selected to relate to me, he experienced a 'sanctioning' of his flying abilities by a group of people to whom he was socially connected, who did not 'fly' themselves; he referred to this experience as 'initiation'. A. was aware that his 'initiation' by these friends felt significant to him and that the initiation made him happy in spite of the momentry intrusion of a sense of discrepancy about it. Therefore I suggest his experience of initiation into flying by these friends is comparable to the sanctioning of capacities in shamanistic cultures.

I asked A. if he were aware that flying is significant in shamanism and especially Siberian shamanism, but he denied knowledge of this aspect of Siberian shamanism. He was aware only that Siberian shamans have a healing function in their communities because he once had a friend who told him about a shaman relative.

B. OUT-OF-BODY ESPERIENCE

The following are out-of-body experiences recounted to me by two informants. The first informant discusses a typical OBE and dreams of her deceased grandmother which were influenced by her OBE. The second informant discusses a 'dual consciousness' experience in which she was aware of herself in out-of-body state simultaneously with awareness of herself in an embodied state.

1. Typical OBE

The following is reproduced from a written report of an out-of-body experience brought to her interview by an informant I shall call K. K. was in her mid-thirties at the time of this interview.

> I was approximately 13 years old at the time this happened. I had gone to bed but was not as yet asleep. I was lying flat on my back, which I later discovered to be a conducive position for this experience. As I lay there with my eyes closed, I began to hear a high pitched tone in my ears, a sort of buzzing sound. Then I felt tingling all over my body. The sensation spread from my centre outwards. Next I had the sensation of lifting off of the bed. I remember that I felt whole, my body was whole but light as air. I came to a lotus sitting position and realized I was floating in the corner of my bedroom. I was scared. I looked down at my body on the bed and thought to myself, "I'm dead". I decided to try to return to my body and with this thought began to move towards the bed. I began to sink so that half of my body was through the floor, my upper body was level with the bed, my head was in front of my feet [the feet on the bed], and it occurred to me that they looked large and grotesque. Panic set in as I felt I would continue falling through the floor to who knows where. With the panic I was suddenly sucked back into my body, I don't feel I was in control of that movement. It was sudden and abrupt--on re-entering my body, I opened my eyes, felt my heart pounding, and began to shake. This experience happened several times and I learned how to recognize the sensations and fight against the experience. I would have to physically get out of bed for awhile, and on returning to bed be sure to lie on my side which would inhibit the experience.

K.'s initial response to this experience was a feeling of dread that it would recur because she was convinced that she had died. She stated that as a teenager she experienced the sense that she was about to leave her body on a number of other occasions, but that she effectively learned how to inhibit the reccurrence of a complete out-of-body experience similar to this one. She was able to learn to inhibit OBEs because subsequent onsets of this experience were signalled by the same buzzing tone in her ears and tingling sensation, and always began while she was lying on her back[1]. In her early teens, she continued to believe that the out-of-body experience signalled by these physiological sensations were "little deaths" and she thought she had somehow defied death by returning to her body in the above experience. On one occasion she awoke to find herself "half in and half out" of her body, aware of herself sitting up out-of-body and simultaneously lying on the bed in her body. She was able to stop the out-of-body experience even after it had progressed this far. K. had no knowledge at the time that OBEs happen to other people. She said that to this day she cannot fall asleep on her back as a result of her struggles in her teen years to prevent out-of-body experiences.

Describing the 'signals' of this experience, K. said that with the high-pitched buzzing tone, the tingling sensation began in her solar plexus area and moved outward into her limbs. During these initial moments she felt only curiosity about what was happening, not fear: "it just seemed very strange, and the tingling and buzzing was very physical...and it seemed impossible to open my eyes or move at all". She remarked that in this experience (and in later onsets of the experience which she learned to inhibit) her eyelids seemed to "weigh a ton". Her eyes were closed, then, during the onset of the experience.

The tone in her ears and tingling sensations ceased as soon as K. felt herself lift off the bed. When she found herself floating in a lotus position in the corner of the room, it was with a full propriate sense of herself, seeing her body as an object on the bed. It seemed to her that her panic and urgent need to re-enter her body propelled her toward the bed in a slow movement, but, she said, "it was almost like I missed, I didn't get quite far enough, and so I figured that what was happening was that I had missed my body, and I was now falling through the floor". Although it seemed that her will to re-enter her body impelled her back toward it, she did not feel in control of her movements during the experience. K. recalled that at this point her body was straightened out as if it were in a standing position rather than being in a lotus position, half above the floor and half below, and from this vantage point she had to look up slightly to see her body on the bed. She could not see through the floor, but could feel her legs and feet floating. For just a moment in this position, it seemed to her that the feet of her physical body were large and grotesque, and not really her own. As she began to sink further her panic intensified, and then she was sucked back into her body. She described this event as follows: "it was like when you get startled in sleep, and you have that falling sensation and then you physically jerk, and you're aware of that physical jerk - except it wasn't the usual 'you're asleep and then you're awake' kind of jerking, it was the same sort of starting". As soon as she was aware that she was back in her body, K. felt that she could now open her eyes, and as she did so, she was relieved to find that she was alive. K.'s eyes were closed when the experience began, and as a voluntary physical action, she did not open them again until the OBE was over. Yet after lifting off her bed she could "see". Except for the moment in which her close-up view of her feet made them seem large, neither her body on the bed, the room, nor any object in the room was distorted; everything appeared as usual. During the interview K. explained that her response to her physical feet was more an emotional response than an actual perception of distortion of her feet. She was amused that one would actually take the time to notice the grotesqueness of feet in the middle of such a hair-raising experience.

When I questioned K. about whether she could see herself in OB state, she replied that when she first found herself floating in the corner of her room, she looked down at her legs and saw them in lotus position just before she saw her body on the bed; she also had the sense that she could raise her hand and see it, but did not do so. I wondered if she could see through the floor when she went through it. She replied she could not: "my senses were the same [as her senses in embodied self-awareness], so if there was something solid I couldn't look through, you know. So when my body was through the floor, looking down all I saw was my body gone through it, I couldn't see where it had gone. But I could feel that I was floating down there, it would have been the basement". She also recalled in the interview that although her bedroom light was off, she was aware of light coming through her window from the street as it usually did at night time. So K. experienced her surroundings according to her non-OBE knowledge of the room as it would be at the time of night in which the experience occurred, and according to her knowledge of the house, in particular the location of her bedroom *vis-a-vis* the basement.

K.' experience remains compellingly real in its longer term impact on her conception of reality. She stated: "If you came to me tomorrow and said you could prove that these were dreams, I couldn't believe. They're just too real, too conscious. So I've decided that I can leave my body. By now I understand I wasn't dead when it happened, but I am convinced my consciousness left - I was there outside".

K.'s out-of-body experiences as a teenager had a further impact on her life.

When she was 21, her grandmother died. K. dreamed frequently of her grandmother for some time after her death. In these dreams her grandmother always appeared in an out-of-body state, in the nude, and flying. These dreams of her grandmother were lucid dreams. When K.'s grandmother appeared in these dreams, she would be visible to K. but invisible to other dream characters. She would hover around other dream characters and play jokes on them or make fun of them, while only K. was aware of her activities. K. informed me that her grandmother had been a joker in real life as well.

These dreams of her grandmother seemed to K. to be imbued -- within the dreams and after awakening -- with the "message" that her grandmother had returned in the out-of-body state to confirm for her that people could exist out of their bodies. K. said "she seemed to be saying, you were right, we can exist out of our bodies", and "she seemed to know everything I was going through at the time". K. had never told her grandmother or any of her family or friends about her out-of-body experience because it was disturbing to her as a teenager, and she thought they occurred only to her. For this reason, the appearance of her grandmother in these dreams was not only a comfort and encouragement to her, but also seemed to confirm her belief that consciousness can leave the body and that it does so permanently after death .

K. recalled that in one of these dreams, she asked her grandmother why she was always naked when she arrived. Her grandmother replied cheerfully "I want to be naked, I love being naked". K. added: "she was loving it, being dead. She was back to tell me that it was great, and there was no problem". Since she interpreted her grandmother's appearance in dreams as a message of reassurance, K. views these dreams of her grandmother as dreams which were 'given' to her for the purpose of imparting reassurance and understanding about her life and about death.

K. now regrets that she was overwhelmed by fear of the experience as a young teenager. She says that now she would be willing to explore these experiences, but that she seems to have conditioned herself to inhibit them as soon as she experiences the physical sensations which signal the onset of out-of-body experience.

K.'s discussion of her OBE and her subsequent dreams of her deceased grandmother was not explicitly religious. However, she expressed her belief that human consciousness can leave the body, that dreams can impart communications from the deceased, and that death is not to be feared because survival of death is like an out-of-body condition. Like A., she reported elements of sleep-related experience which have religious significance in many other cultures, and experienced a confirmation of a sleep-related event (OBE) in subsequent sleep-related events.

2. 'Dual Consciousness' Experience

The following is a description of the dual consciousness experience in which the informant simultaneously experienced self-awareness in an out-of-body state and in an embodied state. It is reproduced from the type-written account she brought to the interview. I shall call this person M. M. informed me at the beginning of the interview that she is narcoleptic and therefore generally starts her sleep with dreaming[2]. M. was doing graduate work at the time of this interview. Three weeks prior to the related experience, she had decided to do field work in Africa. Several days after our interview, M. sent me drawings of the stages of the experience related below to help clarify the visuo-spatial aspects of her experience (Appendix III).

> I had been sleeping for less than an hour when I became aware of a huge sucking wind inside my bedroom. I was sitting on the edge of my single bed, watching another self sleeping face down on the bed. I seemed to have two very distinct bodies. The prone body (PB) was experiencing the sucking sensation, the cool wind, and the emotions of the experience. However, this part of me was unaware of the separation of self. The sitting body (SB) played the role of objective observer at this point, fully aware of the other only visually.
> PB - I felt a cool wind pulling at me from the foot of the bed. It appeared to have a considerable force since I could feel it lift my lower body off the bed and tug hard at the covers which were partially trapped by my upper body. For some reason I knew immediately that the wind had come to transport me to Africa. I became alarmed because I felt I wasn't mentally prepared to go, and because I was sleeping in the nude. I clung to the sheet and the mattress to thwart the wind. I was aware I had been sleeping but was sure I was wide awake now, although I felt somewhat loggy and heavy from sleeping.
> SB - when I first became aware, I observed PB clutching both edges of the mattress, the sheet corner wrapped around her hand, fingers dug in between the mattress and the box-spring. The quilt was partly pulled off, the corner of it twisting in a clockwise direction toward the north east corner of the room. I could not feel the wind, but I had an absorbing interest in what was occurring. PB then sat up and we merged partially, enough to give access to her thoughts. She was thinking "what will the people at Owo think if I appear in the nude. I'll make a bad impression".
> PB - I could feel myself sitting up and I experienced a dialogue within my brain which went something like this: Well, flying to Africa on a wind is an unconventional way to go. If you can get to Africa in this way, no one will know you are in the nude. Oh my god, I should take advantage of this. If we go, then I should try to produce some proof for Dr._____. Maybe I'll get someone there to send him a postcard. I lay back down, but the wind appeared to be much diminished, and I felt considerably heavier.
> SB - I merged fully with PB to add my power to hers. As one body but of two minds -- I was able to levitate off the bed and reached the window, however, now the wind could no longer help me, and I had to go through the glass. Part of me felt I should open the window and remove the screen, but another part felt that was silly and a waste of time. I went smoothly through the window and floated around my building, then west as far as the High Level Bridge, north-west almost to NAIT, before I realized that the window of opportunity had closed. I heard an airplane overhead and decided I had better return to my bed.

> When I woke up I was sitting on the edge of my bed, covered in goose bumps, and the covers were pushed to the foot of the bed. I made a decision to take language lessons before I would leave for Africa. Then I straightened the covers and went to sleep.

M. said in the interview that she confirmed her decision to learn the language of the people among whom she wished to do field work the morning after this experience; in this way the above experience had an actual impact on her waking life. She also told me that an intense feeling of loss and regret accompanied her realization during this experience that the 'window of opportunity' had closed. M. chose to relate this experience to me because of these effects, and, she said, "because it also happened to be the first time that I flew without flapping my arms". She had often attempted to fly in her dreams, and on more than one occasion she had woken up on the floor with her arms flapping and with the sense that her shoulders were very fatigued from her dreamed attempts to fly. M. had two out-of-body experiences previous to this experience, but in these previous OBEs she had only one centre of awareness--in the out-of-body perspective while she observed her body. In her own characterization of the above experience, she said it "wasn't exactly an out-of-body experience, because I was in both places" [that is, outside of her body and in her body]. M. preferred to call this experience a 'dream vision'.

Discussing the beginning of this experience, M. described herself as Sitting Body (SB) as "very much the observer at first", while as Prone Body (PB) she was aware of waking up and aware of the wind sucking at the bedcovers and at her lower body. While PB experienced an immediate knowing that the wind had come to transport her to Africa, SB was observing PB and was aware of the 'split' in awareness between the two of them, but PB was not aware of SB or of the split in awareness.

I asked M. to tell me more about the wind. She described it as "like a whirlwind", "really strong", and feeling "like a giant vacuum cleaner in its suction". I asked M. if the wind were warm or cold, and if she had any sense of an 'attitude' in it, such as friendly or unfriendly. She replied that it was warm, and that it seemed "insistent, but very friendly, not at all unfriendly". She reiterated that as PB she knew that the wind had come to take her to Africa, and she described the feeling that went along with the wind as "very much a feeling of welcoming, and some curiosity, as though it were a "putting out of feelers" toward her; it was insistent, but not so forceful as to actually suck her off the bed as she clung to the mattress. She added "it felt very much like an invitation, but an invitation that you sort of have to attend to". However, PB was reluctant to go with the wind because she was aware of being nude.

While this was occurring for PB, SB was "observing and just recording what was happening". SB observed that the quilt was twisted in a clockwise direction appropriate to a suction-like whirlwind, but she could not feel the wind. As SB, she watched PB's responses to the wind, the pulling of the blankets, and PB's clutching at the mattress, and deduced that something was pulling at PB, but as SB she had no emotional involvement with what she was observing. Nevertheless, as SB sitting on the bed, her perception of PB "clutching both edges of the mattress", of the quilt "partly pulled off" and "twisted in a clockwise direction" were consonant with how PB was experiencing a wind tugging at herself.

Describing how SB merged with PB when PB sat up, M. said: "I merged with the other body. The mind was not entirely merged - it still felt like there were two minds". She described PB as somewhat "befuddled" and focussed on "presentation", on "how I would be perceived" (that is, if she went along with the wind in the nude), whereas SB had an emotionally uninvolved, "what will happen next" attitude. M. said that it occurred to her as SB that she could subliminally influence someone at her destination to send a postcard to Dr. _______.

As SB, she had "a sort of a picture in my mind at that point of the place where I would be arriving, and it was somebody's house, although I couldn't picture the people". She added "I felt the house that I would have been going to...there was something very blue in there and I felt that there were people in that place". M. clarified that as SB, she hoped to subliminally influence people at her destination because as SB she was aware that "if I were going to be travelling over there that way, then obviously it wasn't in physical body" and wouldn't be able to write anything down. PB, however, remained most concerned about what sort of impression it would make if she travelled to Africa in the nude. PB, then, was aware only of the possibility of travelling with the wind, while SB tacitly understood that she would be flying out-of-body to Africa. Hence the statement in the dialogue between SB and PB: "If you can get to Africa in this way, no one will know you are in the nude". For SB, there was a tacit assumption that in the out-of-body condition, one is invisible. SB merged with PB in order to travel in this way. To express the partial merging to become one body of two minds, which were now in communication but still two minds having the dialogue, M. clasped her hands with the fingers only partially intertwined, saying "the minds were sort of like this". She explained that adding SB's power to PB's was mostly adding SB's will to PB's so tht they could lift off the bed. While her awareness was experienced as 'split' between two minds, PB was aware of herself as embodied and SB was aware of herself as disembodied.

According to M.'s drawing, the merged SB-PB body, lying on the bed, had to do a 90 degree turn to exit the room through the window. M. described the going through the window as "pretty neat", saying that "the glass bulged first, and then slowly I just went through...the only thing I felt was just breaking through a tension, the way soap bubbles or something have a tension".

M. said that this phrase "window of opportunity" was exactly what occurred to her after she had flown almost all the way to the NAIT campus and then thought that she should return to her body. I asked if anything in particular had made her realize that. She replied that she felt "the direction trails were no longer there". I assumed that she meant physical paths and roads such as trails in the river valley under the high level bridge and streets leading to the NAIT campus; however, M. said she meant trails in the air. She had to take recourse again to the 'window of opportunity' metaphor to explain this new metaphor of 'direction trails in the air'. The metaphor 'windows of opportunity' refers to her sense of a means of travelling *via* direction trails in the air. She compared this sense of direction trails to one ball inside another: "It was as if you have one ball inside another and you have holes, and I had this feeling as if those holes didn't line up anymore, and I couldn't go through". They had "moved back" out of alignment. So, to go through two holes aligned was to go through a window-of-opportunity, and direction trails in the air were direction extensions from the holes, which were the source of the trails.

When I wondered if the airplane she heard just before she decided to return to her bed, could have been an element of 'ordinary reality', which interfered with continuing her flying experience, M. agreed that the airplane may have been a factor in ending the experience because her attention to the airplane occurred at the same time that there seemed to be something reminding her that she couldn't stay out there; she felt that "something would happen, eventually I'd drop or something". She added "And I would have been really cheesed off, you know, if I had been found buck naked somewhere. It was such a real possibility to me". It would appear that PB's embodied self-awareness became predominant with the sense that the 'window of opportunity' had closed.

In discussing the longer term influence of this experience on her views of life and herself, M. concluded that she was telling herself to prepare herself for going to Africa. She interpreted the experience as a 'message', but also in terms of learning a lesson. M. felt that SB, the objective observer, weighed the other body down and contributed to the window of opportunity closing. This surprised me, as I had been perceiving SB's role differently throughout the interview, and I would have assumed that PB's concern with the impression she would make was weighing SB down rather than *vice versa*. But M. reiterated:

"Yeah, it [SB] weighed, it added too much weight to the prone body" and "I think that the message for me, really, when I thought about it afterwards, is to go with what is necessary and not think about it too much, don't analyse it to death, trust my gut feelings. Yes, it was giving me the message that answers to questions were right inside me...to stay within myself. Separate from having to learn the _______ language".

M. interprets her dual consciusness experience as a dream vision that imparted two messages: she was telling herself to prepare to go to Africa, and that she should pay attention to her subjective, intuitive feelings in the future. I asked M. if she also felt that this experience confirmed her choice to do field work among the_______ people in Africa. She replied that she did not need to confirm this decision because she knew before the experience that this was the right choice for her to make.

In addition to these decisions, however, this experience had another effect. M. had been trying to fly in dreams for some years previous to this experience, and this one was a breakthrough for her. Since then she experienced two dreams where she "soared like a bird". Regarding these dreams, she said, "They were just partly lucid dreams":

> In one I was waking up when I became aware I was flying, and I was flying fairly low, near a tree, there was a road on either side of the tree, and I thought, well I'm so low I'm going to have to go around this way, or this way, then at the last moment I thought I'll be like a jet and go overtop, and I did, I made it and soared around. I soared over a recreation area with a very blue lake -- I could see all the people down below. And then I went closer down to the surface of the lake and I trailed my toes in the lake. And I saw two boys fishing. I decided to surprise them and help them hook a fish. So I went under the water. The water didn't feel any different from the air, and yet I had a sensation of being in the water. I saw a fish and I grabbed for the fish, and my hands went right through the fish. It startled me a bit because I thought I had grabbed it, and I woke up right after that.
>
> [In the second flying dream] I seemed to be in this valley, and I had flown down from a ledge overlooking the valley; in this one I often had to help myself by flapping my arms, but I soared. And there were a lot of people, maybe a congregation preaching,

> some sort of gathering like that outside; and I felt that they couldn't see me so I kept buzzing them...I didn't appear to be seen in the other dream either.

M. echoes A. when she says, "flying is joy. It's a tremendous feeling of release, power, not being dragged down.... I grew up on a farm, and in spring, after the cattle have been penned up all winter, you let them out, they kick their heels up, and they're running all over the place. That's what it feels like to fly".

In summary, M. interpreted her dream vision of dual consciousness as a message -- from herself to herself -- to prepare for her trip to Africa by studying the language of the people she will study, and also as a message that she should pay more attention to her subjective, intuitive feelings in the future. She believed that the lesson to be learned from it was that answers to questions are 'right inside' herself and that she should stay within herself to find these answers. M. believed that SB's observing objectivity and her plans to find a means of sending a message to Dr._______ weighed PB down and contributed to the closing of the 'window of opportunity', rather than believing that PB's worrying about being in the nude weighed SB down. Therefore, M. relied on an objective-subjective polarity to evaluate her experience, and she contrasts the objectivity of SB with PB's 'intuitive feelings' in favour of the latter. Although I found these to be counter-intuitive conclusions, I understood the lesson in the experience to be one for herself as PB, because PB was aware through what M. calls 'subjective, intuitive feelings' that the wind had come to invite her to Africa, and M. feels that PB should have accepted this invitation without worry. I interpret M.'s conclusions to mean that she considered the 'subjective, intuitive feelings' which may occur in a dream/ vision to be ultimately more important than the flying aspect of the experience even though flying is very enjoyable and releasing aspect of her dream life. M.'s conclusions are based on attributing ontological validity to 'subjective, intuitive feelings which can impart valid information to an individual. Like A. And K. (but unlike V., F. and D.), M. did not understand her dream vision in explicitly religious terms, she interpreted it in terms of her personal ontology; she permitted this experience to expand her personal ontology in that she felt more prepared to recognize her 'subjective, intuitive feelings' and any message they may carry for her in the future. The 'dual consciousness' experience also impacted on her dream life in that she could fly easily after its occurrence.

C. VISIONS

I categorize the following experiences as 'visions'. The first vision reported below occurred in the transition between sleeping and waking. It may be called 'typical' in that it involved the brief but clear and definite appearance of a figure who spoke to the informant. This first vision is called 'The Angel'. The second informant reported two longer experiences which occurred during a period when he was both fevered and fatigued.

The first vision is reproduced from a written account brought to the interview by an informant I shall call Y. This vision occurred approximately eight months prior to the interview, when Y. was 28 years old.

1. 'The Angel'

> As I woke up one morning, I became somewhat conscious of my wandering thoughts. I remember I was permeated with positive anticipation of a course on Buddhism which I had registered in. As I was lying in bed looking up, I was somewhat between dreaming and waking up. I then saw an attic door which was connected to a staircase leading downwards towards me. The door seemed to open towards a place beyond. An angel appeared through the door, dressed in a luminous gown. Since I couldn't really make out the face, I can't describe whether the angel is male or female. As the angel came down the stairs, it said to me "I can't believe you're coming back to me after all these years". At that moment I was saturated with feelings of peace, serenity. For a fleeting moment, it felt like someone who has made his way back home from a long hard journey and found out everything is okay.

Y. informed me that this vision seemed to last only about one minute, and he could not recall how it ended or how the angel went away. He said he simply recognized the figure as an angel. Its luminous gown was white, but it had no wings. He said the feelings of peace and serenity felt like a 'homecoming' to him; he was very "relaxed and comfortable", as though he were wrapped "in a cotton ball" and felt as though he were sinking into the bed. This feeling of sinking into the bed was a very pleasant feeling which accompanied the sense of homecoming.

Y. placed this vision in a context of circumstances which he felt contributed to the vision. The appearance of the angel in his vision reminded him of a painting of an angel by a German artist whose paintings have spiritual connotations for him. He also spoke of a movie he called "So Far Away, So Close" that he had recently seen. Most importantly, he connected the occurrence of the vision with a friend whom he described as a 'psychic', who reminded him of a childhood supernatural friend. He said that the 'psychic' friend told him a year prior to this vision that he had always had a supernatural friend, that this friend had been with him in childhood and still protected him. At this time, Y. recalled the supernatural friend of his childhood as a "childish fancy", and said that he had not given much thought to it for many years.

However Y. acknowledged that as a child in Hong Kong he had often felt the presence of a supernatural being whom he talked to. In his feeling about his vision, Y. could not emotionally identify the angel with this childhood supernatural friend. He did believe there was a "logical connection" between the appearance of the angel in a vision and the encounter with his psychic friend a year earlier in which she reminded him of the supernatural friend of his childhood.

Y. explained the connections among the circumstances which he felt were influenctial in the occurrence of his vision as follows. He attended a Roman Catholic school in Hong Kong as a child, although neither he nor his parents were committed to that religion. As a child he was often left alone for long periods because, he said, "my parents had to work very hard". When he was eight or nine years old he began to feel the presence of a supernatural being whom he would talk to about himself. Occasionally he would "ask for things for everyone, not just myself". Sometimes he felt this presence was Christ, and he attributes that to attending a Roman Catholic school. During this time Y. was very concerned about forgiveness and compassion because he felt at this age that many bad things happen in the world. He also recalls that during this time he accepted the supernatural as reality. However, he is unable to recall more about this figure or his relationship with it. When I asked him if he ever saw this being, he replied that he did not have to see it, because he could *feel* its reality. Y. was sure that he did not continue to have this sense of a supernatural friend's presence past the age of ten. When he was fifteen years old he came to

Canada. He returned to Hong Kong for a visit at the age of 22, but he felt that it had changed and that he no longer belonged there. From that time on, he felt "not at home, missing identity".

Y. spoke of this feeling in terms which did not seem to imply any deep unhappiness, but as a pervasive sense of looking for a home. He associates this sense of looking for a home as with the feeling of a journey. He felt that his interest in taking Religion courses was prompted by awareness of his need to come to terms with himself and his need for forgiveness toward people in his life. He associates compassion and forgiveness as a way of life with the Buddhist religion. For Y. the significance of this vision was in its resolution of his feelings of not being at home and loss of identity: "that experience seemed to transcend all that. I've had a longing to return to a place where I belong, and that experience seemed to provide what I was looking for". He said that the feeling this vision ensued in was a psychological state, not one he always had consciously looked for, but a state of homecoming which he recognized when it occurred with the vision. He could not recall ever feeling anything like that sense of homecoming before in his life. Y. also believed that this vision and its sense of homecoming was related to his decision to study Religion, especially Buddhism. He associated this decision with a return of the acceptance of the spiritual that he possessed as a child; he believes this return to spiritual awareness was the meaning of the angel's words "I can't believe you're coming back to me after all these years". Although Y. did not feel that the angel was the same presence that he felt in his childhood, he has felt since his experience of the vision that it was about his return to the same ability to feel spiritual presence that he possessed as a child.

I asked Y. who the angel might be. He replied that there *are* spiritual entities who protect people, "someone invisible, protecting you." Y. compared this vision and his sense of religious experience to what he has read about religious experience. He said that when he reads about the visions and religious experience of famous religious people, these experiences seem so "grand, different from ordinary life". But his vision helped him to see that in spite of its "unexpectedness", religious experience is "really ordinary". For Y., "in ordinary life there's something always there".

Y. interpreted his vision of an angel in explicitly religious terms. For Y., the angel meant acknowledgement and confirmation of his renewed interest in religion and spirituality. The acknowledgement and confirmation were experienced as a deeply moving sense of homecoming. This is a return to a way of being that seemed to be natural to him as a child. An important aspect of this return to spirituality and religious experience is the compassion that he associates with Buddhism. Although Y. traced psychological circumstances in his life which he thought predisposed him to experience a vision of an angel, he expressed belief in the actuality of spiritual beings who are invisible but always there to protect human beings.

Y. described a dream which he had during his visit to Hong Kong. He felt this dream was influenced by his sense that Hong Kong had changed since his childhood and that he no longer belonged there, but he did not attribute any spiritual significance to that dream. He described another awake experience which occurred in the hypnagogic state in which he woke with the sense that he had "slept a long sleep to the end of the world and past the end of time" This was a disturbing feeling, and in this experience he also had a sense of sinking into the floor. Unlike the sense of sinking that occurred in his angel vision, in this awakening the sense of sinking was terrifying and unpleasant. Y. did not attribute any spiritual significance to this hypnagogic event either, although it was memorable because of the fear of sinking and his conviction that he had slept to the end of the world were unusual for him.

2. Fever Visions

The following are two experiences copied from the journal pages provided to me by an informant I shall call C. These occurred while C. was travelling in India, and while he was very ill. He assured me that he not taken medication for a couple of days before they occurred, but he was very ill, and probably fevered. Since he was alone and unattended throughout his illness after visiting a physician, he was not aware at the time that he had fever. He did not know the exact nature of his illness, but said that it was some infectious disease that he had no immunity to as a Canadian. C. categorized these experiences as 'awake' dreams because he was sure at the time of their occurrence that he was not asleep, although he was lying on his hotel bed. He continued to be ill for some time after their occurrence, so that he was not very attentive to the time or to any other aspect of his environment. However, he felt fairly sure that they occurred approximately in the middle of the afternoon. I chose to include C.'s experiences in the category of 'visions' because he was most likely fevered and not sleeping when they occurred, but I accept his own sense that they were 'awake dreams'. Since C. emphasized that indifference on the part of the characters in both 'awake dreams' or visions was relevant to his responses to them, I have titled them "Indifference - First Vision" and "Indifference - Second Vision".

"Indifference - First Vision"

There is a man walking down a city street. The street and buildings are gray, and generally featureless and right angled with charcoal squares for windows like you see in some particular painting style. The man is solemn and purposeful with a large overcoat--he looks like Stalin tho he isn't.

He turns a corner and goes up to a building, where he opens a door and enters. Inside it is all just one room; huge, square, and two-storeyed. On the floor are bits of newspaper and straw, while the windows are huge rectangles and barred. Light streams through the bars, the dust swirling in its beams.

In the approximate centre of the room is a huge (nearly two storey) white feathered bird, twisting and turning pathetically against huge iron shackles, one on its neck, one on each ankle and one on each "shoulder". The shoulder shackles break through some feathers and flesh is evidenced by the blood stains. The bird's eyes are also huge, bulging, and bloodshot. It is scrawny and unattractive, similar to the chicken in its build.

The man seems to take no notice of it. He hangs his overcoat on a hook and goes to the newstand in the corner (the same corner that has the door). It is a small simple newsstand selling candies, snacks, basic toiletries, and newspapers. It has a seat behind but is unattended (Asian style newstand).

He chooses a newspaper, takes it out and walks over to the only chair in the building (about ten feet away, facing no direction in particular). He sits down and crosses his knees and begins to read (the Sports Section).

"Indifference - Second Vision"

About fifteen or more hotel owners (of all the various hotels I have stayed at over the last month) are gathered at the open door to my hotel room, engaged in an excitable, prolonged and typically useless discussion. My clothes and medicines and books, etc., are messily laying around the room. I have died, of some unknown ailment, and am still lying in bed. The owners (their wives are with them also) don't seem upset by this particular aspect of the current events, but rather what should be done now.

A consensus is reached, and they fill the single room, surrounding the bed. There should be some feeling of a funeral parlour with grievers around a coffin; but there isn't, only the feeling of claustrophobia. They lift me and carry me out of the room, through the badly lit hallways and down the four flights of stairs to the ground floor (still continuing their conversation). They then bring me outside to the narrow alleys

> and corridors intersection whereby one can access a main road with a fifty-yard walk; they lay me down into a gutter.
>
> They all returned to the hotel while I lay in the gutter--urine smells and feces smells (of humans mostly) were very strong and never let up. In the gutter with me was plastic and paper refuse, and the water was black. I quickly grew accustomed to my new territory, got used to the passing human and dog traffic above and their accompanying noises, snufflings, betel juice spits, urinations, etc. I was not conscious of a passage of time.
>
> At one point I must have rolled over (they had lain me face down) onto my side for I could suddenly see some light and standing around me talking were some Indian women. They carried concrete mix in steel woks on their heads, and this was their break time. They stood talking animatedly, in vividly coloured saris of red, indigo, yellow and orange. My attention was especially drawn to the beautiful flash of gold from their noserings, their large round earrings and the tika on their foreheads. When they left I was glad, as I had felt I did not know how to react to them if they saw me.
>
> Sometime after this I became aware that my body was not there, in fact probably had been long since gone. I was sharing perceptions and consciousness with one of the many rectangular (3′ x 2′) slabs of concrete that are placed over the d4rains for walking purposes. Mine was an unremarkable slab, being a bit rounded at its edges and with one small crack. When I became aware of this my consciousness left that of the slabs; the stone resumed stone consciousness while mine dissipated away.

Throughout the interview, C. referred to these awake dreams by calling them No. 1 and No. 2. The first experience involved an imagined environment, while the second involved his real environment--his hotel room, the hall and stairwell of this hotel, and real hotel owners. However, C. stated that he felt no break or transition between awareness of his room and the beginning of either experience. Regarding No. 2, he said: "I was just staring around my room then the door opened [and the hotel owners entered]".

In the first of these 'awake dreams' C. experienced the events from a detached, observational perspective. The second experience began with C.'s participatory involvement, as he experienced himself embodied but without tactile sensations, being carried out of the hotel room out to the gutter, after which, he said, there was "a progression of becoming less emotionally involved" until he was simply looking at the slab and the 'awake dream' came to an end as his consciousness "dissipated away".

C. informed me that he seldom recalls his night-time dreams, although he knows he must dream at night just as everyone else does. The 'awake dreams' he recalls from this period of illness in India are memorable for him at the outset simply because he can remember them, and he attributes his ability to recall them to the fact that he was not actually asleep when they occurred. Both of these awake dreams ensued in a deeply felt sense of their significance for C.

Regarding the initial effects of these visions, C.'s said: "In both experiences, there was indifference and that bothered me. In No. 2, there was indifference to deadness, and in the first there was indifference to the bird's suffering." But, he added: "I felt emotionally, something was processed or something happened, right after them, almost purified, but intellectually couldn't say exactly what". He also said, "It was like something beyond my normal self giving me a signal, processing something for me; I can't ever put an accurate finger on what....But processing did occur, I felt better after it [referring especially to No. 2 now] as though spiritually broken through a barrier, a breaking through happened by the dream -- it felt that way as soon as I began to remember it."

C. stated that in this regard, No. 1 was "more primal or meaningful somehow, more emotionally involving" in its effect on him, in spite of the fact that he was not in the dream events, but only observing from a detached perspective. C. was very impressed by this first awake dream, especially with the felt familiarity of the imagined environment and its similarity to some modern painting style. He said that a few weeks prior to the interview, he attempted to find the painting style he recognized in his vision in a twentieth century art anthology.

C. also remarked in reference to No. 1, "the man feels like my dad, like a father figure, but more extreme in the vision". I asked whether he meant his own father, or a father figure in general. He replied "like my dad, it's a feeling like the way I have felt around my dad. And the bird wasn't just some animal, it seemed to symbolize something human." Clearly, this felt significance and its ineffability influenced C. to seek clues for some more specific explanation of it, for in addition to looking at twentieth century art anthologies, he added: "I found out in some dream books, birds tend to represent 'soul'.

I asked C. if the room in which he saw the shackled bird and the sitting man changed at all in the first awake dream. He replied that it stayed the same room, and that this vision or dream was very brief. He said that "at the opening, it was very 1984ish, spartan, empty of warmth; I'm sure I've seen the painting it looked like in real life".

In his reflection on this experience, C. stated that being very sick and very alone must have been a factor in how he was predisposed to feel at the time. But he also feels the experience has deeper significance. He said: "The bird symbolized an aspect of self, something subtle or sublime in myself; feels like there was some bearing on things not resolved in the past; feeling that struggle was important, but it was met by indifference; and there was struggle against *that*". C. suggested that perhaps the struggle is to grow, and part of what held growth back was the past. He reiterated that he felt better about something after this awake dream, though it continues to be impossible for him to put his finger on exactly what he felt better about.

Between the two awake dreams, C. experienced a lot of visual imagery, probably because he was in fever, but they were not coherent. Then, he said, the door opened and all the people entered and the discussion was about the fact that he had died. I asked C. to tell me about the kind of sense he had of himself at this time. He replied "I felt embodied, but not any tactile sensations". Later, as he was lying in the gutter, there was a transition to "seeing the same things as the slab; my body was dissolved, I only had this point of view [the slab's]. As I realized I was seeing from the stone slab, it ended". And, he said "I was like a spectator, uninvolved, nothing tactile at all, as if I'm looking at the slab now [i.e., after his realization that he was seeing from the slab's point of view]. Although in the second experience there was "a progression of becoming less emotionally involved", C. felt there was some message in this experience as well as in the first. However, the message he felt in the second awake dream was more difficult for C. to articulate. He attempted to express this as follows:

> [It's] as if, well, there's a lot out there, you could die, anything could happen, it put a new perspective on life...It wasn't like something processed, but it was like a teaching, something to learn in it, about just life and death. I put a lot of emphasis on consciousness, and I can't separate my thinking about this experience from that fact and how consciousness played a part in that vision. It's as if it said, consciousness is not what you think it is, and where does consciousness go?

For C., then, his second 'awake dream' involved a message regarding consciousness which he felt compelled to pay attention to. In his interpretation of these experiences, C. felt a psychological processing occurred which held spiritual value for him.

CHAPTER FOUR

ONTOLOGY, RELIGIOUS THEMES AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

Doniger & Bulkley (1993) have said that human beings have been exploring their dreams for millennia in religious terms and contexts, and that these religious approaches involve elaborate, insightful reflections on dream experience. All informants in this study indicated that reflection on their dreams and other sleep-related experiences played a role in the selection of these experiences to relate to me for the purposes of my study. Each person selected a dream/vision (or two) to which s/he attributed personal significance and which s/he could assimilate into personal ontology. Although each one, with the exception of C., was able to describe other, and in some cases frequently occurring unusual dreams or hypnagogic experiences, none of these informants appeared to be interested in unusual experience for its own sake. Although these informants were told only that I was interested in how people interpret and understand memorable dreams/visions for themselves, each person selected experiences which were strongly related to his/er personal ontology rather than to more temporary personal concerns. In this way, they indicated that they take certain, but not all, dreams/visions seriously, and each person's discussion of his/er experience revealed that conceptions of self and of what can happen in the world are enlarged through reflection on dreams/visions.

In the following four sections I attempt to illustrate the findings of this study: 1) how each informant revealed the relation between dreams/visions and personal ontology; 2a) how the religious themes of unity, relatedness and caring are important to these eight people, 2b) the importance of these religious themes in past Western religious traditions and other cultural contexts; 3a) the elements of sleep-related experience which have potential religious significance in past Christian traditions and other cultural traditions (mystical communion, numinous figures, flying, lucidity and out-of-body experience) which were reported by informants, 3b) comparative religion discussion of how these experiences are viewed in contemporary secularized culture and 3c) other cultural traditions; 4) how knowledge of the world and culturally given descriptions of reality entered into informants' dreams/visions and their understanding of them.

1. Relation Between Dreams/visions and Personal Ontology

V. described in detail the experience of two dreams of physical catastrophe to the world. Her discussion revealed that her feelings that something cruel had happened in these dreams resulted from the conditions of separation and loss that prevailed as the consequences of catastrophe in both dreams. In V.'s own interpretation of these dreams, she refers to these conditions of life as a kind of 'hell', and her sense that the consequences of the disasters are cruel reveals her own belief that something is wrong when human beings are consigned to this 'hell'. For V., these dream experiences point to a condition of human life that is not whole or happy and therefore not spiritual. V. concluded that these dreams inform her that she must work to help people become more spiritual and that each individual is partially responsible for maintaining spiritual well-being and wholeness in a continuum of human relatedness. These dreams were 'gifts' of this understanding to V, while other experiences such as her sleep paralysis and her recurring nightmares did not hold spiritual significance for her.

F.'s dream of travelling back in time to visit and reassure herself as a child seemed to her to be an unusual dream. Yet she did not take it at face value as just an unusual dreaming experience. She interpreted this dream as one which conveyed a message to herself in the here and now, to keep faith that she could survive all crises. In her dreamed visit to Ramses, she experienced "happiness and almost enlightenment", and the kind of ineffable understanding that is characteristic of awake mystical experience which is also barely amenable to verbalization when the mystical experience has passed (Underhill 1955). The structure of this dream is similar to the manner in which mystical experience temporarily removes an individual from mundane reality into a spiritual reality. An entrance into the spiritual reality was provided in the dream as F. climbed the steps and parted the curtain to enter a space that was different from the dream's initial situation where she had the feeling of being on a trekking holiday. F.'s discussion of the understanding between herself and Ramses that human beings evolve to higher spirituality together, in community, indicated that it was an emotionally powerful confirmation of her own ideal of a human unity that transcends the fact of individuality and cultural diversity. For F., there is a spiritual dimension of reality that one can have faith in and rely on. Her conclusion that the fountain was a symbol of spiritual nurturance which she succeeded in turning on in spite of her sense that someone was watching and disapproving of her action implies a tension in knowing that there are some people who would not understand or accept that there is a spiritual dimension of reality that transcends diversity. While there could be a number of explanations for this element of her Ramses dream, I think it becomes understandable in F.'s discussion of her dream experience in which she defines a spiritual ontology that she is committed to. F. distinguishes her Time Travelling dreams from her nightmares and other unusual dreams even though many of the latter contained images of religious elements.

D. also experienced a mystical condition in his dream which provided a new space, out of ordinary time and space, in which the death of a child and the pain it caused in someone else's life (i.e., D.'s dreamed lives as a an observer-peacekeeper in the riot zone, and his subsequent life as a policeman) were atoned. Although the experience of being someone else, twice, in these dreams was compelling enough to make D. contemplate the possibility of reincarnation, he ultimately concluded that this dream conveyed that there is a spiritual means of coming to terms with the pain that is built in one's life. Like V. and F., D. understood his dream experience figuratively. D. distinguishes between dreams which feel religious to him, and those which do not. Although he frequently dreams of using the magic of his fantasy board games, he is aware that his magical acts in these dreams are suggested by playing these group board games. The dream experience he chose to relate to me was one which felt religious to him because it provided exemplary experience of coming to terms with past pain and thereby communicated a spiritual lesson which D. felt compelled to accept as a truth about himself and life. He accepted that his dream experience informed him of a spiritual dimension of reality that he could rely on.

A. states that his flying dream existence is not contradictory to his education as a scientist. For A., reality cannot only be described in different ways, but also experienced in different ways, so that different realities which are the same reality are experienced in dreaming and waking life. His flying dream experience, with his ability to change "dream spaces", is part of his view of reality as something described, and as something which is experienced and dealt with according to how it described. This personal ontology accords with the insights of theoretical physics, for in physics one deals with levels of reality that cannot be directly apprehended but which must be theoretically described. The personal ontology of A.'s waking experience impacts on his understanding of his dreams. In the context of his background of flying dreams, the 'Old Castle' dream which A. chose to relate to me was special and significant for him. He distinguishes the characteristics of this dream from his usual flying dreams: that it was not one of a series of flying dreams during the same night; that the only important thing in the dream was to fly, rather than some other additional activity such as saving someone from danger; that it was brief and narratively simple, and that it was especially vivid, including even the smell of eucalyptus leaves, and because it ensued in feelings of joy and exhilaration upon awakening. However, after this reflection on the objectively perceived distinctions between this dream and his other flying dreams, A. was also left with a felt significance about the fact that in this dream a group of friends from whom he "spiritually differed" bestowed the gift of flying on him. He noted that this dream involved the crossing of a threshold in flying dreams from frequent difficulty in flying to ease and mastery of flying. This felt significance about the dream and his positive feelings about it remained although A. was unable to further articulate the significance of being 'initiated' by these particular friends. I suggested in Chapter Three that this significance and his positive feelings are due to his experience of being sanctioned and recognized by these friends.

K. believes, as a result of her out-of-body experience, that human consciousness can leave the body because the experience of being conscious outside of her body was so real for her. This belief is a typical consequence of out-of-body experience (Irwin 1985). However, K.'s initial conclusion about the experience was that it meant that she had died. It was through reflection on her dreams of her deceased grandmother that K. reached two conclusions: that consciousness can leave the body while one is alive, and that death results in an out-of-body state similar to that which can occur while one is still alive. K. felt that her dreams of her deceased grandmother confirmed that human consciousness can exist outside the body, and that death is not to be feared. K. came to believe that she could take the opportunity to explore this out-of-body state now that she sees it in this way, if it were not for her learned inhibitory response to the physiological sensations that precede the experience[1]. So through reflection on her OBE and on her dreams of her deceased grandmother, K.'s beliefs about what is possible for human being in the world were expanded, and her anxieties regarding death were alleviated.

M. believes that her experience of dual consciousness, one aspect of which involved flying out-of-body, carried the message that she should prepare herself for her trip to Africa; but she felt that the most important 'message' in this experience was that answers to her questions are "right inside" herself and that she should stay within herself to find these answers. Her acknowledgement that one of her reasons for selecting the experience she related to me was that it was the first time she flew without flapping her arms, indicates that she understands this experience to be a breakthrough in terms of flying in her dreams, and it has significance in this context because flying is a joyful and releasing dreaming experience for her. Since the experience she chose to relate to me held relevance to her actual life situation and implications for her further dream life, she distinguished this experience from two previous OBEs to which she did not appear to attach any significance. M. interpreted her experience in terms of the ontological validity of her own personal "subjective, intuitive feelings" as guides in her life.

Y. understands his vision of the angel as an encounter with the spiritual reality that he was aware of as a child when he frequently felt the presence a companion who existed on a spiritual plane. He also understands the encounter with this spiritual reality as a confirmation of his decision to take Religious Studies courses, and as an indication that his decision to take a Buddhism course will open the appropriate new path in his life. Y. considers ordinary reality to be pervaded by a spiritual dimension, as he indicates when he says "In ordinary life there's something always there"..

C., who seldom recalls his dreams, felt that his dream/visions were performing a spiritual processing function for him, although that process remained inaccessible to him in specific meaning. C. could relate these dreams/visions to his need for caring while he was ill, and could also relate them to his evaluation of his relationship with his father. However, his dream/visions were ineffable for him because the spiritual processing which he felt occurred was a verbally inaccessible processing of emotional and existential issues by a self 'beyond his normal self'. C. does not view either of his experiences, not even the dream/vision of dying and being carried outside to be thrown into a gutter where his consciousness dissipated away, as originating in a spiritual dimension of reality. Yet the sense that something had been spiritually processed made these dream/visions important, if ineffable, for C. The felt sense of a self beyond his normal self remained influential in the significance that these dreams/visions held for him. These experiences also stimulated C.'s reflections about consciousness, as well as his realization that consciousness is something that he does not know a lot about.

In summary, these eight informants revealed that they do engage in elaborate and insightful reflection on their dreams. They do not take these experiences at their immediate face value, nor do they accept their lived experience of their dreams/visions literally. However, they rely on dreams/visions as personal experience. While informants are aware that a dream or vision was a dream or vision, that it occurred in a different state than the state in which they recall it, they respond to a dream/vision as an experience that is essentially continuous with all of their life experience, and they use that dream/vision experience in the same way that they use the rest of their life experience -- to construct and re-construct their personal ontologies and their lifeworlds. This is the first most important conclusion about the meanings which these eight people attribute to their own dream/vision experience and about how their dreams/visions are related to their personal ontologies. The second important conclusion is that the dreams/visions which informants selected as significant to relate to me, and their discussions about these experiences, reveal known religious themes.

2. Religious Themes

a) Religious Themes in Informants' Sleep-related Experiences

For all informants, the themes of compassion and caring, and transcendence of distinctions of boundaries among people are significant. This is most explicit in the dreams of V., F., and D., "Noah's Ark" and "The Bomb Falls", "Time Travelling", and "The Atonement", respectively.

In both of V.'s dreams involving physical catastrophe to the world, life continued for the survivors in a manner which ensued in feelings of separation and loss. In "Noah's Ark", the dead are not merely dead, but precluded forever from the salvation of those who continue to live; those who continue to live are forever separated from those who are precluded from salvation, and cruelly reminded by tombstones of this fact. In "The Bomb Falls", everyone in the group who "went outside holding hands" to watch the bomb fall, knows that consequences of the botched disaster will be wrongful consequences for them as human beings. Both dreams provided vivid experience of how people cannot live and V. was compelled to interpret this experience as a figurative representation of 'hell'. This figurative expression implies its opposite, 'heaven', as an ideal unity of humanity which is maintained by caring and individual responsibility for the continuum in human relatedness.

In her reflection on her dream of Ramses, F. expresses a transcendence of the distinctions between past and present, between generations, and between diverse cultural and religious traditions. She also expressed the belief that people evolve to higher spirituality in community, with relatedness to each other and to the wisdom of the past. For F., the value of continuum in human relatedness was the explicitly religious meaning of her Ramses dream.

In his dream, D. experienced an 'atonement' situation wherein he and the child, together again at his own dreamed death, atone for the previous death of the child and the pain that accumulates in someone else's life, through a being there for each other that transcended the conflictual situation in which the child's death occurred. If D.'s own sense of the spiritual meaning of his dream involved coming to terms with pain, that pain is about someone else's (i.e. the child's) suffering, which in turn accrues from the existence of these distinctions in human life.

In A.'s flying dreams there is an obvious kind of transcendence in his flying as a way of overcoming the physical limitations of waking life. However, in his 'Old Castle' dream, A. was initiated by his Orthodox friends who bestowed the gift of flying on him. Of these friends, he said: "They remain my friends up to this time, but spiritually we differed". The bestowal of the gift of flying by Orthodox friends in this dream can be seen as a sanctioning, or recognition, of his flying by these friends.

While A. does something in his dreams which these friends do not do, and therefore has a different inner, personal life and possesses different capacities, his difference is sanctioned by his friends and their spiritual differences are momentarily transcended in the "Old Castle" dream. To support this understanding, we can recall A.'s statement, referring to how vividly he experienced this dream: "My friends were behind me...I was doing my own thing and at the same time we were connected to each other" (italics mine). Therefore A. experienced unity with friends who differed spiritually in the "Old Castle" dream, and rightly apprehended that there was significance in the fact that he was "initiated" by these particular friends in this dream. Although he believes that dreams, like waking reality, have no "underlying aim or purpose", A.'s experience and its specialness to him indicate that transcendence of distinctions and relatedness are important for A. himself, and their expression in his dream allowed a resolution of distinctions in that after this dream, A. could fly in his dreams without effortful attention to technique.

Like A., K. did not speak of her out-of-body dreams or her subsequent dreams of her grandmother's appearance in an OBE state in explicitly religious terms. However, she felt that the dreams of her grandmother were imbued with a 'message' quality which confirmed that human beings can exist outside of their bodies and that death holds no reason for fear or despair. So K. also experienced sanction of a previously experienced reality in her dreams of her grandmother. In these dreams where her grandmother appears happy to be dead and in her own out-of-body condition, K. is no longer separated from others by her OBEs which she thought only she had experienced. K. experienced sanction of a sleep-related experience in subsequent dreams, and she experienced transcendence of the distinction from others which she had felt this out-of-body had imposed on her.

In M.'s dual consciousness experience and the flying dreams which followed it, there is transcendence of physical life through flying, but M. uses this flying ability to attempt to playfully help some boys catch a fish. In spite of the fact that she is unsuccessful because her hand goes through the fish and she wakes up, her attempt to help others with her flying ability is an attempt to use this ability in connection with others, to be connected to others while flying, so that flying, and being invisible while doing so, does not isolate her from others.

For Y., the themes of forgiveness and compassion were important, and also implied a valuing of unity among people rather than separation through strife. For C., concern with indifference in both of his visions points to the value of its opposite, which is caring, just as V.'s dreams pointed to the value of caring through experiences which felt cruel to her.

These themes of unity through transcendence of distinctions, relatedness, and caring are present in the dreams/visions of these informants and in their discussions of these experiences. As I noted above, they responded to these dreams/visions as vehicles of meaning by which to construct and re-construct their personal ontologies and lifeworlds. But it is also noteworthy that they selected only dreams/visions which were significant in the context of ultimate concerns about human life for the purposes of the study rather than choosing dreams or visions which they considered to be related only to their own personal lives, and these ultimate concerns involved known religious themes. The following section deals with how unity, relatedness and caring are important religious themes in past Western religious traditions and other cultures, as well as how these themes are expressed in visionary experience in religious traditions with a view to comparative discussion of attitudes to dreams/visions.

b) Unity, Relatedness and Caring in Religious Traditions

Transcendence of distinctions and divisions is an important theme in all 'World Religions' and in the religious outlook of many smaller scale traditional cultures. Victor Turner says in *The Drums of Affliction* (1968: 8) that people come together to perform religious ritual in terms of beliefs that are so powerfully held that they overcome all the forces that under other circumstances divide them from one another and set them at odds. In his discussion of the importance of the *mudyi* tree in the girls' initiation rites among the Ndembu of Africa, Turner suggests that the use of this symbol means for the Ndembu that "a person is nourished by the family, the matrilineage, and the tribe", and that this ritual contains symbolic suggestion that the mother-child relation is the ideal model for the individual-human community relation (p. 18). This ritual involves dramatic enactment of some of the sources of disunity among people, followed by dramatic overcoming of these sources of disunity. Turner says that religion and its rituals have often been viewed in terms of a 'wish fulfilment' theory which assumes that in religious practice of rituals, people find emotional security and pretend while they perform the rituals that reality does in fact conform to their wishes. But Turner finds a fundamentally different insight in religious practice. He says: "But to my mind it seems just as feasible to argue that 'the wish to gain control of the sensory world' may proceed from something else--a deep intuition of a real and spiritual unity in all things. It may be a wish to overcome arbitrary and man-made divisions" (p. 22).

It is a similar feeling on my own part which compels me to see the conspicuous lack of caring and unity in V.'s and C.'s experiences as reference within these dreams/visions to the value of caring and unity for human spiritual well-being. Neither V. nor C. failed to notice that the lack of unity and caring were factors in their emotional responses to their experiences. The valuing of a continuum of human relatedness is manifested in each informant's experience, although it is discussed explicitly as a spiritual value by V., F., D., Y. and C., but not by A., K. or M. This religious theme has precedent in visions that have been recognized as religious experience. In her book *Revelations of Divine Love*, the fourteenth century English anchoress Julian of Norwich describes a vision in which she received communications from God regarding his love for humanity. Throughout her vision experience God told her in various but ineffable ways that "all would be well". Julian understood this communication to inform her of universal salvation, so that ultimately no one suffering in hell, no heathen who had not accepted the knowledge of Christ, and no Jew, would be abandoned by God or banished from the future spiritual salvation of human beings. Knowing that universal salvation was not theologically accepted in her time, Julian wondered how it could be that all human souls would ultimately be well in union with God. She believed that God's answer was "What is impossible to you is not impossible to me".

Transcendence of divisions has also been part of religious revelation outside of the Christian tradition. In the vision that the Sioux Black Elk narrated to R. Neihardt, Black Elk says:

> Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world and while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw, for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy Neihardt, 1961, pp. 42-43).

Compassion as a spiritual trait has a place in 'World' and traditional religious views as well. In the Christian tradition it is exemplified in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians regarding charity where Paul concludes that charity is a greater spiritual gift than faith or hope (I. Corinthians 13:1-13). It is a religious theme in other cultures where dream and visionary experiences are the source of spiritual power. Both Lame Deer and Black Elk distinguished between the various kinds of 'medicine men/women' in their culture, and the kind of healer who is obliged by visionary experience to "take pity on all crying things" (Neihardt 1961; Erdoes 1972). In her study of the vision quest among the Plains Indians, which she undertook from a history of religions perspective, Dugan says that central to every notion about the vision quest were the convictions that a vision would be given because the spirits took pity on the one who received it, and that the vision belonged as much to the people as it did to the one who experienced it (Dugan 1985: 140). For the latter reason, visions were often acted out in the community in order to effect the vision's power for the good of the community. In Siberian shamanism initiation experiences must be recognized as such by the potential shaman's community before s/he is sanctioned as a shaman, for shamanistic capacities must be employed in the service of the community (Eliade 1964). This evaluation of dreams/visions is very different from that of the secularized twentieth century view where dreams/visions are considered to be private, subjective experiences which have no ontologically informing validity apart from their status as imaginary experience which informs about the individual. Yet the people who spoke to me in this study were informed by their dreams/visions about matters that pertained to aspects of human life which we call 'spiritual' even if some did not discuss these matters in explicitly religious terms.

3a. Elements of Sleep-related Experience That Have Religious Significance in Past Western and Other Cultural Contexts

Informants in this study reported elements of sleep-related experience which have potential spiritual/religious significance in past Western traditions, in other World Religions, and in smaller scale traditional cultures. These include mystical communion experience, the appearance of a numinous figure, flying, out-of-body state, and lucidity during dream experience. The dreams/visions of F., D. and Y. imply the capacities that are important in religious contemplation and vision seeking. The experiences of A., K. and M. imply the capacities that are important in shamanistic cultures for mediation between other-worldly and this-worldly realities.

A., K. and M. are not unique in having flying, lucidity and out-of-body experiences. Others in secularized twentieth century culture have these experiences and even cultivate them as opportunities for exploring consciousness and reality (LaBerge 1985; Green 1968; Irwin 1985). In the descriptive literature of the early twentieth century, one of the most engaging books was written by Mary Arnold-Forster. In her chapter on her own flying dreams, she describes how she had flown in her dreams since early childhood when she discovered that she could leave frightening dream situations faster and more effectively by flying than by walking or running. Eventually Arnold-Forster experienced a dream similar to A.'s dream of being gifted with flying by a group of friends, after which he could fly more naturally and effortlessly than before. In this dream, Arnold-Forster met with a group of British scientists, including Lord Kelvin, in the precincts of the Royal Society. While demonstrating her ability to defy the laws of gravity as she flew around the room to these gentleman, Lord Kelvin pronounced "Clearly this law does not for the moment affect you when you fly". Arnold-Forster states that whenever she afterwards fancied in the middle of her flight that she was losing her power to fly, she could say to herself "You know that the law of gravitation has no power over you here. If the law is suspended, you can fly at will". In this way Mary Arnold-Forster was sanctioned in her dreams by no less a personage than Lord Kelvin! Although Arnold-Forster took a somewhat amused view of this dream, she also took seriously its capacity to enhance her flying ability. During the first World War she had many flying dreams in which she was commissioned to use her flying ability in the service of her country. Like the informants in this study, then, Arnold-Forster's dream flying included the use of flying to help others rather than remaining a capacity which she enjoyed in isolation from others in her flying dreams. Arnold-Forster also recounts one out-of-body experience which ensued in a response similar to K.'s initial response. Like K., she thought she had died, and she was overcome by grief and loss as she saw her sleeping husband lying beside her own body in their bed. She states that this experience was never repeated, which suggests that she inhibited its recurrence.

3b. Sleep Research Regarding Mystical Experience, Flying Dreams, Lucidity, and OBEs

Contemporary Western psychological sleep research has established some traits associated with mystical communion experience, flying dreams, lucidity and out-of-body experience. Those who report lucid dreams also tend to report flying dreams (Green 1968). Those who report lucid dreams also frequently report OBEs, and Hunt suggests that lucid dreams and OBEs have a logical and definitional similarity because they both involve development of a detached observational attitude and a tenuous balance with participatory involvement in dream events (Hunt 1989: 121).

Other studies have shown that lucid dreamers have unusually good physical balance and vestibular integration (Gackenbach, Snyder, Rokes, & Sackau 1986); furthermore, there is correlation between good physical balance and the tendency to report mystical experience during wakefulness (Swartz & Seiner 1981). It would seem that the whole arsenal of personality tests available in experimental psychology has been administered to lucid dreamers, for lucid dreaming has been found to predict capacity for imaginative absorption (which itself predicts hypnotizability), vividness of imagery, and creativity (Hunt 1989). Finally, Gabbard &Twemlow report that OBEs are associated with high levels of psychological and emotional well-being.

Mystical experience, flying, dream lucidity and out-of-body experience, then, are associated with capacities for vivid imaginative experience, and there is much evidence to suggest they are associated with a kind of self-command which is related to coordinating self-awareness with sensory awareness of external reality.

The development of these capacities is important in a number of religious traditions. Among the informants in this study, A. demonstrated sensory self-awareness in his ability to recognize the physiological self-state that is a precursor to flying in his dreams along with the ability to perfect his flying technique. M. and C. both demonstrated the detached observational attitude: M. as Sitting Body in her dual consciousness experience, and C. throughout both of his awake dreams. And K. was able to exercise command through her ability to inhibit further OBEs, especially in her detached observational attitude when she woke once to find herself half in and half outside her body[1].

3c. Self-Control in Some Religious Traditions

In Tibetan Buddhism, Naropa's Doctrine of the Dream State involves command of sensory awareness of self and the external world in the interests of developing lucid dreaming as a stage in spiritual development; the ultimate aim is to dissolve the illusory nature of all sensory phenomena in order to meditate on the Divine Void while dreaming as well as during wakefulness (Guenther 1963). Tibetan Buddhism does not make the sharp distinction between sleeping and waking mind that is traditionally made in Western culture. It is interesting that in this regard, this Doctrine has at its disposal precise language for psychophysiological experience which has not been developed in the West. Guenther points out that the Tibetan word *lus* is usually translated as "body", but does not imply "body as opposed to mind", as it would for members of Western cultures (Guenther 1963: 124). The word *lus* should be understood to mean "body-mind", or "the body *as lived in by the subject*" (emphasis mine). This implies that a psychological aspect intrinsic with body is meant when the word *lus* is used, and *lus* therefore refers to one's whole sense of self as embodied and conscious, as one is aware of oneself moving, speaking, thinking and feeling at any given time, and in any given state. It is awareness of, and command, of this psychophysiological aspect of self that is sought as a means of cultivating lucid dreaming in Tibetan culture. Other Tibetan traditions, such as the chodpa tradition, seek command of lucid, awake dreaming in order to realize the illusoriness of fearful, demonic apparitions in both dreaming and waking consciousness (Evans-Wentz 1935).

In other cultural contexts, this sort of command is necessary. Myerhoff has written of the importance of balance to shamans among the Huichol, as it was demonstrated by the shaman priest Ramon Medina Silva:

> One afternoon, without explanation, he interrupted our sessions of taping mythology to take a party of Huichol friends and myself, to an area outside his home. It was a

> region of steep barrancas cut by a rapid waterfall cascading perhaps a thousand feet over jagged, slippery rocks. At the edge of the fall, Ramon removed his sandals and announced that this was a special place for shamans. He proceeded to leap across the waterfall, from rock to rock, frequently pausing, his body bent forward, his arms outspread, head thrown back, entirely bird-like poised motionlessly on one foot. He disappeared, reemerged, leaped about, and finally achieved the other side (Myerhoff, "Shamanic Equilibrium: Balance and Mediation in Known and Unknown Worlds", pp. 100-101).

The next day Ramon explained "The *mara'akame* must have superb equilibrium, otherwise he will not reach his destination and will fall this way or that". By destination, this *mara'akame* refers to a destination in a spiritual level of reality. To reach the destination is a matter of travelling to a different, sacred level of reality than that which is apparent to the non-*mara'akame*; it is not a matter of a different state of the *mara'akame*. The fact that Ramon would leave a taping session to practice the balance he requires to mediate between sacred and non-sacred levels of reality while he is in the same state he was in for the taping sessions shows that he makes distinction between sacred reality and the mundane reality that is manifest to everyone else, but he does not make a distinction between his 'states' or between the capacities required for different states. For him, the *mara' akame* who interacts with Myerhoff to tell her about Huichol mythology, requires the same capacities as the *mara' akame* who travels in that other reality that is not manifest to everyone at all times. However the secularized twentieth century view makes a sharp distinction between 'altered' and non-altered states, as well as between the sleeping state and the awake state. In the religious traditions mentioned above, the distinction is between a spiritual level of reality, which the religious expert learns to enter at will, and manifest reality which the spiritual reality brings into effect. Experience at one level of reality is transferable to another level, so that the shaman will practice capacities required for 'magical flight' in his/er normal waking state, and the Tibetan will practice meditation during dreaming. They allow a continuum of life experience across personal states.

Secularized culture makes sharp distinctions between 'altered' and non-altered states, as well as distinctions between sleep-related events and ordinary waking events. Behaviours that occur in altered or sleep-related states are not viewed as abilities which may be transferable to non-altered states (unless one counts transferability to performance on psychological tests!). In this study informants indicated that they responded to their dream/vision experiences more similarly to non-Western and non-contemporary cultures than the secularized view would predict. They responded to dreams/visions as part of a continuum of life experience rather than treating them as if they could have no ontologically informing validity because they occurred in a sleep-related state. They also revealed a tendency to repeat dream/vision capacities in subsequent dreams. I suggest that a large factor in these responses was the vividness of these dream/vision experiences. Events in these dreams/visions occurred as they would if such events were to occur in waking life, and the vividness of their experience was compelling enough to induce informants to assimilate them into their whole life experience. In addition, informants' discussions of their dreams/visions indicate that both awareness of their lifeworld as it was at the time of the dream/vision, and culturally given descriptions of reality, tacitly accepted by informants, entered into their dreams/visions to become factors in why they treated these particular dreams/visions as significant. The following section deals with how knowledge of the world and culturally given descriptions of reality entered into informants' dreams/visions and their understanding of them.

4. Knowledge of the World and Culturally Given Descriptions of Reality

In this study, all informants' experiences incorporated the culturally given knowledge present in their own personal backgrounds. V. dreamed of a Bible story, and of a nuclear disaster, according to her knowledge of how the first story is told, and according to knowledge of how a nuclear bomb would affect the world - the light, the intense heat, the wind, and the probability that some people would survive a nuclear disaster. In F.'s dream of returning to visit herself as a child, she was in fact 22 years old at the time, and she recalled that the dream location was the actual neighbourhood in which she lived as a child in England. Her dream of Ramses involved knowledge of Hindu religion and familiarity with some historical aspects of Egypt as well as familiarity with Egyptian art. It also incorporated knowledge of the distinction between 'old European' architecture and present-day Euorpean architecture. The inclusion of a fountain that must be turned on in her dream involved tacit knowledge of how symbols are commonly understood, for the fountain and her understanding of it as a source of spiritual nurturance for everyone is an example of expression by root metaphor in her dream, as Bulkley would most likely point out. Finally, awareness of multiculturalism is particularly salient for F. as a Canadian of

East Indian ancestry in both her dreamed discussion with Ramses and in the interview when she spoke of the value of cultural heritages.

D.'s dream reveals awareness of events and issues which are particularly important in the twentieth century post-colonial world, where ghettoized and disadvantaged groups in many parts of the world have been revolting against their political and economic circumstances. These three informants reveal awareness of concerns that are particularly salient to the twentieth century, which are transformed to spiritual concerns in their dreaming and in their interpretation of their dreams.

The flying dreams and out-of-body experiences discussed by A., K. and M. incorporate tacitly-known descriptions of how reality functions which ensue from the basic ontological propositions of our culture. Although A. speaks of dream reality as different yet still the same reality as waking life, in his dream reality there are some consistent rules that recur across his dreams. To change dream spaces, a stairwell or corridor must be provided as the means for transition. His dreams are not unique in this respect, for Green & McCreery (1975) note this provision of physical means of transition from one place to another in the descriptions of OBE reporters, until they learn to will their transition to a distant location. Knocks on doors signal danger, and even in this different reality there is a technique for flying which must be practiced in order for flying to be successful. This technique seems to involve transfer of aspects of the physical world as A. knows it in his waking life, for in order to fly he must provide 'ballast' in the form of a volume of air located in his solar plexus area to balance himself, and he must use control of his breathing in order to ascend or descend. He must be aware of a self-state that signals the ability to fly, for he uses kinaesthetic awareness of the felt sensations that must be present as conditions for flying in his dreams.

Furthermore, the presence of danger which is conscious and clever, but not seen, is perceptible only to A. in his flying dreams; those he must save are not aware of the danger he is saving them from, so that the flying condition is associated with awareness of danger that others are not aware of. Looking at the experiences of K. and M. can shed some light on this aspect of A.'s flying dreams, although he did not speak of it.

In K.'s out-of-body experience, which occurred very similarly to 'classic' sleep onset OBEs according to Irwin's and Gabbard & Twemlow's studies (1985; 1984), it is clear that the OBE is compelling because it ensued in K.'s conviction that consciousness can leave the body. This is a typical response to OBEs because when one has an OBE, one experiences oneself outside of one's body just as one would expect to experience this event if consciousness *could* leave the body. K.'s experience occurred entirely according to her knowledge of her room, of the house and its outside surroundings (i.e., of how a streetlight would shed light through the window at night), and of her body. This characteristic of OBE's prompts Celia Green to call the OBE experience a 'metachoric' experience because a hallucinatory, but almost exact reproduction of one's environment is constructed imaginatively, so that one sees oneself and one's environment as per usual, but from a different angle of regard than one would from the actual position of one's body (Green & McCreery 1975)[2].

In K.'s OBE, there was also a tacit assumption regarding disembodiment which was associated with her conclusion that she was dead - for she could go through solid objects, and the fear that she could keep sinking to "who knows where" attests to this assumption that if one is disembodied, then consciousness has left the body, and the rules that govern solidly embodied existence no longer apply. On the other hand, K. could not see through the floor or other solid objects in her OBE condition. She said "My senses were the same", meaning the same as in an embodied state where her centre of awareness is in her body. Seeing is tacitly associated with the felt centre of awareness, according to her normal experiential knowing of how one sees. This contrasts with D.'s kind of awareness during his 'out of time and space' condition in which he sees and hears "in an abstract sort of way". K.'s seeing in OBE state also contrasts with the manner in which mystics such as Meister Eckhart have described awareness in mystical union; in the cultivation of union with the divine in both Eastern and Western traditions, there is emphasis on reaching an imageless state.

In the typical OBE condition, one experiences according to what one expects through normal sensory experience. To see one's body and feel oneself light in weight means that one's consciousness has left one's body; therefore one is now disembodied, so that consiousness can pass through solid objects because one is no longer solid oneself. K.'s passing through the floor was an alteration of reality as she understood it to be, and the change is a logical one. This is important because in K.'s later dreams about her grandmother, her grandmother's appearance followed the same alteration of rules: in her OBE state she could fly, was invisible to all other dream characters except the lucid K., and could perform activities which other dream characters were not aware of. As a disembodied invisible entity, she did not require clothing. In M.'s dual consciousness experience, Sitting Body (SB) rationally intuited that if she went to Africa in her out-of-body state no one could see her and that in an invisible out-of-body flying state she clothing would not necessary, although Prone Body (PB) was disturbed at being in the nude. The association of SB's out-of-body condition with invisibility carries over into the flying dreams which M. had following this experience. Of these dreams where she "soared like a bird", M. said: "And there were a lot of people, maybe a congregation preaching...and *I felt that they couldn't see me* so I kept buzzing them. *I didn't appear to be seen in the other dream either*".

At the end of the dream in which she attempted to help some boys catch a fish, she says: "I saw a fish and I grabbed for the fish, and my hands went right through the fish". So M.'s experience also involved alteration of the known, usual rules that govern reality. Her experience as SB incorporated the same assumptions that if consciousness leaves the body then one is invisible and can pass through solid objects, and one does not require clothing. Although A. did not speak of being invisible, he was aware of entities which others were not aware of in his flying dreams. Mary Arnold-Forster also did not specifically characterize the flying state as invisible, but she did note that people seldom noticed her flight during her dreams (p. 69).

These aspects of dream/vision experience compel me to conclude that there is more cultural patterning in dream/vision experience and in interpretation of that experience than we usually attend to in the contemporary secularized context. In addition to this cultural patterning, there is indication of personal patterning of sleep-related experiences indicated by all informants in this study except C., who seldom recalled his dreams. V. repeated her end-of-the-world theme in a number of dreaming experiences. After dreaming of travelling back to visit herself as a child, F. soon dreamed again of travelling back to a previous time of human history to visit Ramses. D.'s dream repeated the theme of his being an observer-peacekeeper in an area where disadvantaged are revolting against the conditions of their lives, and also incorporated a hypnagogic, out-of-body-like experience which was similar to mystical union experiences, into this dream which he selected to tell me. A. learned within his flying dreams to travel back and forth between 'dream spaces', and transferred the gift of flying from the Old Castle dream to subsequent dreams where he could fly more easily. He also reported frequent attempts to explore the experience of entering a tornado. M. also carried her mastery of flying from her 'dual consciousness' experience, along with her assumptions about how reality functions, over into subsequent flying dreams. K. transferred her experience of consciousness outside of her body and the idea of death associated with it, to dreaming in which her deceased grandmother appeared flying in the out-of-body state. Y. regained contact with a level of reality he had known in childhood. Although C. did not recall enough of his dreams to indicate the same manner of personal patterning, it is possible that a learning or patterning occurred between his first and second awake dreams. He experienced his first dream of the shackled bird from a detached perspective in which he did not participate in the vision events, and became progressively more detached in the second vision until he became aware of his own consciousness dissipating away.

For all informants in this study, it was as though what happened in a sleep-related experience enlarged their repertoire of knowledge about what can happen in the world, so that one sleep-related event introduced a new vehicle of experience and meaning which was used in a subsequent sleep-related experience -- in subsequent dreams for these informants.

In the next chapter, I discuss these findings in terms of theoretical conclusions I come to about them, and in terms of implications for further research involving dreams/visions and individuals' own interpretations of them.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

1. Summary of Findings

This study was undertaken in order to examine how people in contemporary secularized culture are informed about themselves and the world through reflection on their own dreams and other sleep-related experiences. Informants in this study revealed that they reflect on their dream and other sleep-related experiences in order to understand and interpret these experiences for themselves. They revealed that they take these experiences seriously enough to assimilate them into their personal ontologies and also allow these experiences to expand their personal ontologies. This process does not involve taking these dreams/visions at their immediate face value. It involves reflection and reasoning so that informants interpret and understand their dreams and visions beyond their initial responses to these experiences. They compared the dreams/visions they chose to relate to me for the purposes of this study with many of their other dreams and sleep-related events to which they did not attribute significance. The dreams/visions that informants felt to be significant were vividly experienced at both sensory and affective levels, and they possessed narrative coherence. Sensory and affective aspects were consistent with dream/vision events. A third characteristic of these significant dreams and visions is that the events of these experiences occurred as one would expect them to occur in ordinary waking reality, if such events *were* to occur in ordinary waking reality. Tacitly known ontological propositions which govern the perception and interpretation of reality entered into all informants' dreams and visions as well as into their understanding of these experiences. In this way, significant dreams and visions were related to informants' personal ontologies and to culturally given descriptions of how reality works (or how it would work if events such as flying and OBEs were to occur in awake experience). These characteristics were associated with a compelling sense of meaning that inclined informants to respond to their dream/vision experience as though it were essentially continuous with their whole life experience, and to use dream/vision experience to construct and re-contstruct their lifeworlds. For some informants these ontological propositions which entered into their dream/vision experience included explicitly religious values which they acknowledged to be inherent in their personal spiritual ontologies (V., F., D. and Y.). For others, the basic ontological propositions involved tacit knowledge of culturally given descriptions of how reality works (A., K., M. and C.).

Two known religious themes can be observed in the dreams/visions that informants related, and in their understanding of these experiences: the theme of human relatedness which transcends the separating forces within human existence, and the theme of caring for others. These themes were explicitly present in discussions by V., F., D., Y. and C.; they were implicit in the dreams/visions of A., K. and M. and in the felt significance which these three informants attached to their experiences. For some informants, these religious values were experienced as transformation of issues that are of particular concern in the twentieth century into personal spiritual concerns. These include conflict between advantaged and disadvantaged cultural groups, the concept of unity within cultural diversity, and the possibility of nuclear disasters (D., F., Y. and V.). Other informants expressed concern with twentieth century issues regarding human consciousness, the survival of death, the relative values of objectivity vs. subjectivity, and nature of reality (K., C., M. and A.). Therefore these eight informants indicate that some spiritual concerns which arise in secularized twentieth century culture are reflected in dreams and visions, as Doniger & Bulkley (1993) suggested.

Informants in this study reported the kind of sleep-related experiences which have religious significance in many other cultural traditions and in past Western traditions. These include flight, the use of flight to help others, being apart from one's physical body, being out of ordinary time and space in mystical communion with divinity, and meeting with a dream character who is imbued with the quality of an ancestral figure who can impart spiritual wisdom. These elements of dream/vision experience were associated with capacities which were learned and developed within sleep-related experience, and sometimes sanctioned in subsequent dream experience. Other themes such as the ending of the world via catastrophe, and conflict between advantaged and disadvantaged peoples, recurred as vehicles of meaning in informants' dreams. Therefore these informants reveal personal patterning in their dreams/visions which is different from the kind of dream that is called a 'recurring dream'. This is an interesting aspect of these informants' dream and vision experience which would require research with larger numbers of people in order to establish how frequently recurring themes enter dreaming, and whether these recurring themes are often associated with particular issues for people.

In summary, these informants responded to their own dream/vision experience as though it were continuous with their other life experience, and they relied on their dream/vision experience to be informed about themselves, the world, and about spiritual aspects of human life. They did not treat their own dream/vision experiences as though these were psychological occurrences which referred only to their own personal circumstances, and in this regard they departed from the formalized secular view of dreams and visions as purely private, subjective experience. None of these informants disregarded the psychological nature of dreams or visions; each one was aware of the personal circumstances surrounding the occurrence of his/er dream, OBE or hypnagogic vision. However, they accorded validity to their dreams/visions as vehicles of meaning which they felt compelled to interpret and understand, and they attributed meaning to these experiences which went beyond their own psychological circumstances. In this regard, these informants departed from an assumption about dreams and visions that is inherent in the secularized view of sleep-related experiences as private and subjective. This assumption is that dreams and visions (and other phenomena such as trance and reverie consciousness) are asocial in nature by virtue of the fact that they are private, subjective experiences. However, it appears to me that the implications for relatedness to others and external reality were salient in every informant's choice of significant dream/vision to relate to me for the purposes of this study. The following two sections discuss the theoretical implications of these findings and the implications for further research respectively.

2. Theoretical Implications

Traditionally, the secularized view has focussed on dream/vision experience as private, subjective experience with purely psychological antecedents. The relation between subjective imaginative experience and the secularized socio-cultural context in which it occurs has been relatively disregarded in studies of dreaming, imaginative reverie and vision consciousness in Western psychological research, including research which does not adhere to psychodynamic principles. In therapeutic contexts, psychodynamic principles still prevail as the means of understanding private imaginative experience such as dreams. Hunt points out that in order to understand Freud and his influence in psychodynamic traditions, it is important to remember that Freud considered the dream to be asocial (Hunt 1989: 12). However, in this view of dreams as asocial, Freud was following the assumptions about dreaming that existed in Western culture for several centuries before his own work. One of Freud's own statements about dreams exemplifies this assumption. Freud said: "[The] dream has nothing to communicate to anyone else; it arises within the subject as a compromise between the mental forces struggling in him, it remains unintelligible to the subject himself and is for that reason totally uninteresting to other people" (Freud 1905: 95-96). There are a number of assumptions in Freud's statement which are not borne out by the experiences of informants in this study nor in their own understanding of these experiences. The first is the assumption that to be 'social' means interaction or communication with others. From this assumption it would follow that since dreams and visions, as private experience, do not involve actual interaction or communication with others, they are asocial occurrences. A second assumption is that as a compromise between mental forces within the dreamer, the dream is essentially discontinuous with the dreamer's awake self-awareness, motives and relation to external reality. Third, this statement reflects the assumption that the expression of the struggle of mental forces within the dreamer, as perceived by the 'expert', can inform the 'expert' about the dreamer. Finally, Freud's statement that the dream is unintelligible to the dreamer him/erself and uninteresting to others because it is unintelligible to the dreamer, reflects the assumption that the dreamer requires an 'expert' to interpret his/er dream; it also reflects an ideology pertaining to the relationship between the individual and community in Western societies as this ideology explored by Foucault in his work on the origins of social science discourse in Western culture (1977; 1980).

Western thought about dreaming, visions and other imaginative experience has focussed on how these experiences should be viewed from a public, objective perspective. However, the focus of these views, which were developed mainly in therapeutic contexts, became entrenched at the expense of inquiring into whether or not individuals at large really do consider their dreams/visions to be unintelligible, and whether or not they attribute any kind of reliability to their dream/vision experience. Freud sought to identify the mental forces that he posited as the origin of dreams on his patients' behalf, and he established the importance of acquiring his patients' own associations to dream elements. But he and his followers focussed on knowing about dreams from a public, objectifying perspective in order to enable experts to assist individuals to attain self-knowledge. Jung and his followers also remained in this tradition in spite of their disagreements with the psychoanalytic tradition. In fact, Jung laid a heavier burden on the expert in his theories of dreaming and imaginative experience, for he stressed that one who seeks to truly understand these experiences must be well acquainted with world religions and mythologies.

If a different criterion for 'socialness', such as relatedness to others *within* dream/vision experience, is applied to these experiences, then almost all dreams and visions are social in that some form of interaction or relatedness to others occurs in them. Recent perspectives on dreams and visions also acknowledge them to be socially influenced. Hunt points out that simply attending to dreams is part of socially malleable and patterned process, and that dream formation can become part of an ongoing dialogic process (Hunt 1989: 12). The most frequently cited illustration of this process in European and North American societies is the manner in which individuals' dreams are influenced by therapists' theoretical orientations about dreaming. In awake imaginative experience, a dialogic process between an individual and an entire cultural context is evidenced in some guided imagery techniques, when spontaneous imagery is permitted to become autonomous and then occurs with conformity to cultural traditions (Merkur 1992: 223). Merkur cites this practice as one experientially similar basis for the use of lucid awake dreaming in Western societies and Inuit shamanism; but this technique is also used in chodpa practice in Tibetan Buddhism (Evans-Wentz 1935).

In past Western societies hypnotic trance experience was subjected to social shaping. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries people employed Mesmerism to explore 'higher' selves and the notion of 'Over Soul'; some individuals developed completely other personalities which could be elicited only the Mesmerist (Ellenberger 1970). And it has already been noted in Chapter One that the predisposition for imaginative activity that occurs with sleep paralysis is subject to culturally given categories of meaning.

Dreaming, imaginative reverie, and visionary experience can be viewed as a dialogic process between self-experience on the one hand and experience of the external world on the other. Some literature containing first person accounts attests to the social malleability of dreaming in specific socio-cultural contexts. A deeply disturbing book is *The Third Reich of Dreams* (Beradt 1966) which reproduces dreams of Germans from the 1930's. At this time Germans began to hear and read their dream thoughts as slogans due to their constant exposure to the pervasive Nazi propaganda over radio and in public places. Most of the dreams reported in this book reveal that during this time, Germans frequently dreamed about how they were becoming participants in a totalitarian society where all felt sense of unity with non-participants, and especially Jews, was eschewed. The dreams about personal rejection of Jewish friends and relatives reveal how Nazi ideological ontology crept into individuals' perception and interpretation of their own relations to those who were to be rejected.

In this study, informants' revealed that they remain related to others both within their dreams and visions and in the personal beliefs which they expressed in regard to these experiences. While their dreams and visions were private and subjective, they were by no means asocial, and they were related to concerns that went beyond the individuals' own personal circumstances.

In many other cultures dream and vision experience is not categorized as purely private and subjective. The content of many dreams/visions is considered to be an experience of reality as it manifests itself differently than its usual mode of manifestation in awake experience. For this reason dreams and visions are potentially important spiritual/religious experiences which have implications for others as well as for those who report them. Often this spiritual/religious level of reality is referred to metaphorically as a reality behind the one we usually see. Black Elk refers to 'the world behind this world' in his discussion of visions among the Sioux, including his telling of his own and Crazy Horse's visions (Neihardt 1961). A Paviotso shaman says: "There are two nights. The second one comes behind the night that everybody sees....Only shamans can see this second night" (Halifax 1979: 103). These statements refer to vision consciousness. Merkur cites instances of how the Inuit say that while dreaming, "people can live a life apart from real life, a life they can go through in their sleep" (Merkur 1992: 94). Merkur also notes that in the esoteric shamanistic language of the Inuit, anyone's dreaming is referred to as "that which makes one go head-first" and any dreamer is referred to as "one who throws himself headlong into an abyss" (p. 95). This means that those who are initiated into Inuit shamanism, the religious/metaphysical experts in Inuit culture, consider any dream to partake of the same 'other' reality which the shaman experiences in trance journeys to that other reality. In these cultures, a distinction is made between seen and unseen reality, and dreams/visions are thought to provide entry into the unseen reality. No sharp distinction is made between subjective and objective as a criterion by which to evaluate experience. For this reason, the dreams and visions of an individual are often very interesting to others because they may have implications for everyone in the community.

In the origins of Western religious traditions we also find that dreams and visions were thought to be portals to spiritual reality with implications for the community as well as for the individuals who experienced them. According to a number of Biblical prophets, God would withdraw dreams and visions as a sign of disfavour towards individuals and whole nations (cf Micah 3:6-8). I noted in Chapters One and Four that Western mystics were theologically permitted to conceive of mystical union as direct contact with divinity. The insights they gained during these experiences were permitted into theological discussions as sources of knowledge about human relations with God.

The informants in this study revealed that their responses to their dream/vision experience is more in accord with the responses of individuals in other cultures and with

the attitudes of individuals in past Western religious traditions, than with the predictions of the formalized secularized view of dreams and other sleep-related experiences. If individuals in contemporary secularized culture attribute informing validity to sleep-related experiences, and if we accept that the events of these experiences occur as we would expect them to occur according to tacitly known descriptions of reality, then the findings of this study have implications for further research which can contribute to understanding the spiritual and ethical concerns of secularized twentieth century peoples. There are also implications for cross-cultural insights.

3. Implications for Further Research

As members of contemporary secularized culture, the informants in this study are not formally encouraged to cultivate the kinds of experiences they reported, nor are they encouraged to rely on these experiences for informing validity. Yet their dream/vision experiences reveal similarity to the dream/vision experiences of other cultures. Events which occurred in one sleep-related experience recurred in subsequent dreams; capacities were learned and developed in sleep-related events and sometimes sanctioned in subsequent dreams; themes recurred as vehicles of meaning and experience from one dream or vision to another, as though what happens in sleep-related experience expands one's repertoire of knowledge about what can happen in the world, even if some things can happen only in other dreams and visions. As the Inuit peoples intuited within their own world view, these informants indicate that they can experience aspects of their existence completely apart from their waking existence, which they bring into relation with their waking existence in reflection on their dreams and visions. This is all the more noteworthy in that it is not consciously voluntary on the part of most informants (V., F., D., K., and Y.). Only two informants deliberately cultivated dream/vision capacities (A. and M., although K. expressed a wish to do so). One informant explicitly expressed a view that is similar to that of some traditional cultures -- that dream existence is 'another existence' which is distinct from waking existence, which partakes of an 'other' reality that is yet continuous with waking reality (A.). A.'s view is also consonant with the view of modern physics in that he speaks of how reality is experienced as it is described; and A. cultivates experience within alternate descriptions of reality. One informant explicitly endorsed the subjective-objective polarity that is prevalent in Western thought, although she accorded a higher value to subjective experience in contrast to the conventional positivistic view which accords higher value to the objective perspective (M.). M.'s attribution of higher value to Prone Body's subjectivity than to Sitting Body's objectivity in her dual consciousness experience somewhat dismayed me because SB to me to possess more rational intuition about the possibilities presented to her, while M. appeared to associate 'intuition' with subjective feelings. However, I understand that M.'s affective experience as PB may have been more salient for her than her objective attitude as SB. In spite of M.'s own evaluation of her dual consciousness experience, her description of dual consciousness can provide insight into the experiences of peoples who do not make a subjective-objective polarity, but who are able to experience reality in terms of 'seen' and 'unseen' manifestations of reality. M.'s dual consciousness experience reminds me of many Inuit sculptures of 'drum dancers' -- shamans who use the drum and chanting to elicit trance consciousness for entry into unseen reality. Her experience especially reminds me of a sculpture of a two-headed drum dancer. In this sculpture the artist used two heads with open mouths to express the drum dancer's entry into the sacred level of reality in which s/he still remains in contact with mundane reality. Descriptions of experiences such as M.'s offer insight into the world views of others.

Interviews with M., A. and K. also suggest that secularized culture may exert more 'cultural patterning' on dream/vision experience and its interpretation than we are aware of. I suggested in Chapter Four that Western mind-body dualism may shape OBEs *as out-of-body experience*, and may also influence the alterations of rules that pertain to how reality works that occur in flying dreams and OBEs. These alterations involve the association of flying 1) with invisibility, 2) with out-of-body state, and 3) with the capacity to see danger others cannot see. The alterations also include the association of out-of-body experience with 1) nakedness, and 2) with the ability to pass through solid objects. It is interesting to note that in several Inuit shaman traditions, the word 'naked' is the esoteric metaphor for being on shamanistic flight (Merkur 1992).

The rules that govern events and behaviour while in the spiritual reality which exists alongside mundane reality are altered in other cultures as well; learning the differences is part of shamanistic apprenticeship, for example. Before the more obvious cultural shaping of these experiences occurs, there may be more subtle universals in how human beings perceive reality than we are aware of. Perhaps, if we develop means for seeking differences and commonalities in human ontologies in cross-cultural dream and vision research, this research could contribute to understanding cross-cultural understanding.

This kind of research would rely on perceiving a dual aspect of dream/vision experience. Informants in this study relied on personal dream/vision experience within two contexts: self-awareness, and tacitly known descriptions of the world. Their dreams and visions, and their own understanding of these experiences, reveal their relation to external reality as that reality is culturally described. The dream/vision, then, is an interface between subjective experience of self in the world, and the world's influence. If this is so, then xperience-centred phenomenological methods can reveal how individuals perceive and experience within culturally given descriptions of reality and can be used, as Doniger & Bulkley (1993) point out, to gain insight into the spiritual concerns that arise within the ethos of twentieth century secularized culture. Individuals reflect much of those concerns and that ethos in their dreaming and vision experience. The meanings which informants attributed to their dreams/visions in this study were *in* their dreams and visions. I would illustrate this here by positing that, early in the morning more than twenty years ago, a ten-year old girl was dreaming all of the meaning that she ultimately articulated in her interview with me about her dream 'Noah's Ark' (V.). Her dreaming was subjective awareness of and response to a religious tradition and its implications, in the same way that dreaming in the Third Reich was subjective awareness of and response to the totalitarianization that was occurring in Germany in the 1930's. As a child, her intuition of the implications of her religious tradition were inchoate, and ensued in her childhood fear of an arbitrary and punitive God who threatened the continuity of human relatedness. The dream V. Called 'Noah's Ark' may reflect her awareness of and response to the Protestant injunction to rely solely on faith in God[1] ; it may reflect her response to the abandonment of worldly attachments that is required before passing on to a spiritual realm, the fear of the break in the continuity of relatedness that seemed immanent in that passing on. In any case, her dreaming reflects a religious tradition, as much as it reflects her own need to contend with it in order to reach an adult spirituality. The negative and the positive aspects of a cultural ethos are reflected in dreaming, for all of the terrible meaning that the Third Reich pointed at the world was reflected in the dreaming of individual Germans in the 1930's.

As diverse as the dreams and visions of these eight informants seem to be at first glance, all of these informants indicate that people are contending with a world in private, subjective experience. The world they contend with is reflected in descriptions of their experience and in their discussions of how they understand these experiences, and so are the spiritual and ethical concerns that arise in that world. The world that these eight informants reflect in their dream/vision experience is the twentieth century secularized world, and I have concluded that these informants reveal some of the spiritual concerns that arise in twentieth century secularized culture. It is feasible, therefore, to develop means of using experience-centred studies of dreams, visions, and other private subjective experience for exploring socio-cultural realities and the concerns of people who live in those socio-cultural realities.

NOTES

Notes to Chapter One

1. In this study I will use the word 'vision' to mean out-of-body experience as well as to mean the appearance of numinous figures and other images which occur in the transition between waking and sleeping states. Although I do not claim or refute that consciousness can leave the body in out-of-body experiences, in this study I treat hypnagogic out-of-body experiences as a kind of imaginative, constructive cognitive activity that is associated with hypnagogic states, and therefore I refer to them as sleep-related 'visions'.

2. For the purposes of this study I am following Bulkeley's definition of 'modern Western culture' when I refer to 'contemporary secularized Western culture', or 'secularized twentieth century culture'. By his term 'modern Western culture' he means geographically the cultures of North American and Western Europe; temporally those cultures in the twentieth century; and ideologically, the people within those cultures whose views have been primarily shaped by the Enlightenment, by modern science and technology, and by psychological approaches to human nature (Bulkeley 1994: 229). I especially follow Bulkeley's ideological definition regarding these cultures; I do not assume there is any purely isolatable group of people in which each and every member would reflect exactly the same views or cultural makeup that can be called 'modern Western culture'. Therefore I did not assume that informants in my study should belong only to Western European, Caucasian ancestry. Secularized twentieth century culture, including formalized discourse, is now shared by people of diverse racial and cultural heritage. I would assume that any person of any racial or cultural background who volunteered for my study shares a culture with me and with any other informant by virtue of the fact that s/he lives, socializes, and works or studies in the same environment, while simultaneously sharing a cultural heritage with other members of his/er particular non-European cultural heritage.

3. Bulkley and Bulkeley are the same author. Between the publication of the Doniger & Bulkley article and his book *The Wilderness of Dreams*, Kelly Bulkeley changed the spelling of his name.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. According to Irwin's work on out-of-body experiences in which he

discussed others' studies of OBEs as well as his own, not everyone who reports OBEs reports physiological sensations preceding the OBE. The sensations K. describes are frequently reported but are not a criterion for a 'typical' OBE. A typical OBE is one in which a person views his/er body from a perspective outside the body.

2. Narcolepsy is a sleep disorder characterized by intense and extended REM sleep which, for some individuals, will occur periodically throughout the day as well as during a night's sleep. Narcolepsy is also characterized by sleep onset REM physiology, whereas in the normal sleep cycle the first REM episode occurs approximately ninety minutes after sleep onset. Narcolepsy is also associated with frequent flying dreams and frequent lucid dreams (Hunt 1989: 183).

Notes to Chapter Four

1. According to the Irwin studies, physiological sensations preceding OBEs are associated with ability to control the experience.

2. Green & McCreery treat OBEs as hallucinations of oneself in an hallucinated environment, and therefore they discuss OBEs in their monograph about apparitions.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. I am indebted to Professor Francis Landy for this insight regarding the Protestant ethic as it may be reflected in V.'s dreaming.

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APPENDIX I

Dream Research

Volunteers Wanted

To participate in a study of how people interpret and understand their own dreams, especially dreams which they consider to be different from their ordinary dreams. The researcher is also interested in the 'visions' which sometimes occur during relaxation or between waking and sleeping. Participation will require 1 to 1.5 hours of your time (scheduled at your convenience).

If you often have (or have had in the past) dreams/visions which cause you to think about them for some time after they occur, and if you would like to participate in a study which would involve talking about one or more of these experiences, please call 492-2174 and leave your name and telephone number (8:30 am - 4:30 pm weekdays; an answering machine will take your message at any other time).

Note:

1) Confidentiality is guaranteed.

2) The researcher is interested in YOUR reflections, concepts and feelings regarding your dreams/visions; the researcher will not apply any preconceived theories of dream/vision interpretation to the information you provide.

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APPENDIX II

Informed Consent Form

Researcher: Suzanne Burgess
Supervisor: Dr. Eva Neumeier-Dargyay

PROCEDURE:

I understand that to participate in this study, I will complete a Questionnaire on which I will first read and answer some questions about transcribed actual dream/vision reports, and then provide a written description of a dream/vision experience of my own which I am willing to discuss with the researcher. After completing the Questionnaire, I will talk with the researcher about how I view this experience. This discussion will be tape-recorded, OR the researcher will take notes, according to MY choice.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I understand that the information I provide on the Questionnaire and while talking with the researcher will be kept in a secured location which only the researcher and her supervisor have access to. The researcher may discuss the information I provide with her advisors, but no identifying associations with any individual informants will occur during these discussions with advisors. The researcher may quote the written or verbal information which I provide, but no identifying statements regarding any individual informant will be made in the researcher's written report of this study.

I understand that I may stop my participation in this study at any time during the procedure, and that I may withdraw permission to use any or all of the information I provide.

The researcher may tape-record the interview during which I discuss a dream/vision experience with her.

Yes_______ No_______

The researcher may contact me in the future if she requires clarification of any information I provide.

Yes_______ No_______

_______________________________ _______________________

Name Date